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THE INDIAN POETIC TRADITION

AN ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY FROM THE VEDIC PERIOD TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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C... ED BY
SACHCHIDANANDA VATSYAYAN
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न लगायें।

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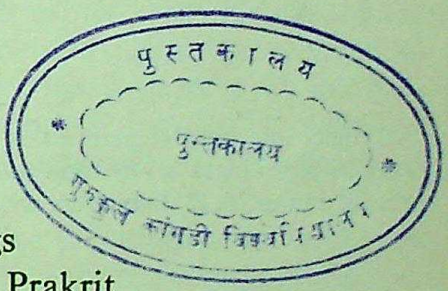

Select Readings
from Sanskrit, Prakrit
Pali and Apabhramsa Poetry

Y.K. PUBLISHERS
8 PARASURAM NAGAR, SHAHGANJ
AGRA-282010

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Published by:
Yogendra Jain
For Y.K. Publishers
8, Parasuram Nagar, Shahganj
AGRA-282010.

Printed at Indraprastha Press (CBT), Nehru House, New Delhi-110 002.

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FOREWORD

Any anthology, representing as it does the application of certain criteria of selection, is open to criticism. An anthology of poetry is even more vulnerable because the criteria must necessarily incorporate some subjective predilections. Since such vulnerability is inherent in the process of selection, the editors need make no apology for what is offered here: the reader is invited to read and enjoy these selections first *as poetry* and secondly as artistic expressions of the Indian genius. That most Indian readers, particularly those versed in the Indian tradition, will miss a great deal goes without saying. Over forty centuries of intensely creative involvement with nature and man cannot be compressed into a volume of the present compass. Indeed if the present volume reminds readers of cherished passages which are not here included, the editors would almost consider it their good fortune. If the rest find material here which gives them a sense of surprise and discovery, that too would be a matter of deep gratification.

Though in many ways this selection may justifiably be regarded as the only one of its kind, it is not that translations do not already exist of almost everything that is included here. What makes this anthology different is the approach to the material. The *Vedas,* for example, have been translated more than once by individual scholars and teams of scholars. Many hymns have also been incorporated in 'Source Books' of Indian tradition. But the translator's sensibility has never been the poet's; nor has the scholar translator been concerned with the poetry. The compiler of the 'Source Book' too, has been the scholar of religion, the sociologist, the anthropologist, the historian of tradition, but hardly ever the lover of poetry. It is thus that hymns to Indra or Agni, and especially those associated with sacrificial ritual, have been considered important, whereas those to Dawn or Night or personations of striking natural phenomena, however beautiful in expression, have

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been found dispensable. It is thus that a spell to drive out fever has been regarded as more suitable for inclusion than an equally magical but far more arresting spell to compel a girl's love. Since the present anthology was not concerned with religious belief or ritual but with the poetic imagination, it will be found not to include in its Vedic section any hymn to a deity *as deity*. The hymns that are included are there only because of the poetry, the reach of the poetic fancy, the power and daring of the contemplative intelligence, the majesty of the aesthetic vision, religious concepts being entirely incidental.

Similarly in the Epic section, the narrative elements has only been allowed to creep in to the extent to which it is necessary as a frame of reference. What is sought to be presented is a selection of lyrical passages or those concerned with the poet's understanding of the human predicament, his poignant realisation of the protagonist's struggle for human value, his sympathy. This applies also to the verses selected from Sanskrit and Prakrit plays.

Not much need be said here about the arrangement. The List of Titles has been so designed as to present a key. Undoubtedly such a treatment of the table of contents is somewhat unusual, but the editors hope that this innovation will help the reader to get a clear and concise if schematic perspective without needing a separate historical outline. The Notes at the end of the book, as well as the general outline offered in the Introduction, should provide such additional information as the reader may need to further stimulate his enjoyment of the poetry.

Translation has not been easy. But we sincerely believe that what is offered is felicitous not only as a compromise; that none of the strain of the exasperating choices often involved will show at the seams. Any translation of poetry involves the problem of serious linguistic, aesthetic and cultural differences; the present anthology has had the additional problem of temporal difference. How can a translator bring over a

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genuinely 'foreign' poetic ethos? How can be find equivalents for style and prosody that have none? How should he convey highly special and difficult meanings of symbols, epithets, allusive names? The Indian reader may wonder whether the use of the adjective 'foreign' here is reasonable. He only has to consider the absolute and deliberately achieved impersonality of the traditional Indian poet and set it against the intensely personal tone of contemporary poetry in any Indian language or in English. How can the translator achieve impersonality in modern verse translation, particularly of the lyric, without deadening the vitality of the original?

But it is not necessary to expatiate on these problems, though not all have been resolved with equal success. The translators have attempted to make the diction modern, particularly with respect to simplicity and concreteness, and to keep the locutions complex. There is no attempt at concealing the initial remoteness of the material where such remoteness exists: the effort has been to lessen it by vivid language. If the results of such a compromise have been somewhat uneven, it should not be too surprising; nor, having one made it clear that equivalents have had to be found when in reality there are none, need the translators invoke the sympathy of the reader for their efforts. A translation either succeeds or fails. When it fails, no explanation of the difficulties can put Humpty Dumpty together again; when it succeeds it is generally followed by the realisation that it can be improved! That is one of the known hazards which the translator runs and which makes his task, though derivative, a constructive one.

We can only hope that the translations presented here will create in the reader a better appreciation of the Indian Poetic Tradition and encourage him to delve deeper into it, whether through translations or through the original texts. If we succeed in luring him into the adventure we shall have achieved our purpose: as for him, we have no doubt at all his efforts will be richly rewarded.

—The Editors

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian Poetic Tradition is a fabric woven around three strands and one cannot understand the special textural quality of the fabric without appreciating their sustaining strength. Indeed without such appreciation one cannot correct the utterly distorted view of Indian literature created by the persistent misinterpretation of the cliche about 'unity in diversity': a distortion exaggerated by political prejudice to a point where critics are sometimes heard posing the question; "*Is* there such a thing as *Indian* literature?" These strands of unity and continuity may be formulated thus:

I. The tradition of Indian poetry is predominantly an oral one. The uttered word has till quite recent times had an edge over the written word not because ancient Indian societies were unlettered or without systems of writing but because the rightly-spoken word was considered to be the most efficient instrument of communion, first between man and the deity and then between man and man. The unmanifest word was the seed of creation. In other words, creation was analogous to an act of speech. *Vak,* Goddess of Speech, was the embodiment of creative energy and the abstracted reality of all realities in early Indian thought. For this reason incantation, recitation and effective speech were regarded as amongst the highest achievements of man. From meticulously preserved mnemonic evidence, we know that elaborate rules of correct pitch and intonation had been formulated as early as the 8th century B.C., when most of the early Vedic works on phonetics were composed. Good speech was the outward manifestation of the true nobility of man. The act of good speech was an act of purification and simultaneously an act of recognition. The seer-poet continuously regenerated the world.

That the speech act was clearly a rebirth of man was an

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idea reflected in the name of the language itself. The name 'Sanskrit' does not have any racial, geographical or historical connotation. Etymologically the word 'Sanskrit' is composed of two segments, *sam* and *krita; sam* meaning 'well', 'properly', 'fully', and *krita* 'done', 'fashioned', 'made'. The infixed sibilant between the two segments denotes, according to Panini, a definite purpose, *viz.*, to be purified of taint and to be imbued with power. Sanskrit was not merely a language artificially created for use by the elite as often wrongly assumed; it was a language developed by a cumulative mind intent upon resurrecting its powers to achieve good. Language was continuously winnowed and sifted: it was through such a process that the Goddess of Speech was being perpetually rediscovered. In turn she reinvested words with power.

This absolute faith in the uttered word, repeatedly reaffirmed in successive periods, is the first important strand of unity in the tradition. As *Vak* was *kalyani Vak*, 'benign speech', so the poet or *kavi* was the human counterpart of the creator, autonomous, comprehending, all-encompassing. Language and illumination were identical.

II. The second strand of unity may be described as a release from history or, more precisely, as the capacity to transcend history in the modern sense of that word. Much confusion and misdirected criticism has resulted from the mistaken notion that the Sanskrit word *itihasa* corresponds to history. *Itihasa,* literally 'thus verily it has been', is a narrative of past events, the recitation of which is a part of the process of self-renewal and regeneration. In the Indian tradition, *itihasa* is coupled with *purana,* 'that which is old and is still new' or 'that which renews the old'. The *Puranas* are an important body of literature in the Indian tradition, comprising theology, mythology, cosmogony and chronology into one elaborately structured whole. The *Puranas* too were meant to be recited. Both *itihasa* (which covers the two great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and *purana* (the *Puranas* number more than forty) cover much common ground; both originated from accounts of heroic deeds or ballads (*gathas*)

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sung in ritual commemoration of ancestors as part of post-funeral rites.

The reinterpretative or rather re-creative role of these works pushed strict chronology into the background. The myth had a self-renewing, eternalising aspect which appealed to the Indian mind. The great mythological figures, such as Siva, Rama, Krishna etc., changed from *Purana* to *Purana,* from poem to poem, and yet can be seen as perceptions of eternal entities.

The mythological bias of the Indian mind has often been a target of mockery. The western 'scientific' approach together with the Semitic and the Sino-Nippon tradition, has been almost obsessed with history and the historical obligation of man, an attitude essentially linked with a view of time as unidirectional, irreversible and 'deathward set'. It is only in recent years that modern man in the West has gradually reawakened to the value of myth not only in the enrichment but even the survival of the human personality. The Indian mind has always conceived of change within a framework of continuity; a new event is regarded not as a historical product of preceding events but rather as a re-enactment of the first event of creation. Poetry, as a creative event par excellence, has been naturally more ahistorical than any other intellectual pursuit. This is well illustrated by two phenomena: the ingenuity of successive generations of poets in introducing new motifs in the Rama and Krishna legends (in a way this process involves a direct realisation of living presence, not the reconstruction of a historical person) and, second, the dominant tendency to reject chronological order in deference to aesthetic order (*e.g.,* the *Mahabharata* is regarded as a successor to the *Ramayana*).

III. The third strand of unity in the tradition is a world-view which does not allow for a dichotomy between matter and spirit, man and nature. In this holistic view all life is one, and inner and external reality are mutually dependent. This world-view is held by all the languages of India and is reflected

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in the importance given to compassion in the hierarchy of values.

The role of the forces of nature in the shaping of human destiny in this world-view is understandably different from the role assigned to them in the Graeco-Roman tradition. Whereas in the latter, nature is hostile or at best indifferent to man, in the Indian tradition nature shares man's joys and his predicament. It is for this reason that in the poetic tradition there is an abundance of conventions woven round natural phenomena; a parallelism between human activity and natural events. The cycle of the year, or the cycle of years, is not merely the spinning of inert spheres round a lifeless ball of fire; it is the *cycle of life*. The cycle of seasons assumes major significance in the epics; an event is not merely an occurrence in a chain of causality but an expression of a specific *maturity of time*.

PERIODISATION & DIVISION

When proceeding to periodise Indian literature, this essential unity and the significance of this view of time has to be kept in mind. Labels like the Vedic Age, the Epic/Bardic Age, the Classic Age, the Populist Age may then be seen to be not more than convenient tags for a particular focus. They cannot be regarded as having a rigid sequentiality, with each age denoting the extinction of the preceding one. The Vedas, for example, continue to be a vital force even in contemporary poetry (they are repeatedly referred to as "the breath of the Universal Being"); conversely in the earliest Vedic literature we can find strains of a folk tradition as well as of a well-organised scholastic tradition. An invocation to the spirit of the forest coexists with philosophical musings on the mystery of the cosmos; a prayer for material well-being is coeval with the concern for the inner soul.

However, a distinction can reasonably be made between the different conglomerations, such as Vedic, Epic and Puranic literatures; and again between these and *Laukika*

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literature concerned with the here-and-now—secular literature in the modern sense. As already indicated, Vedic, Epic and Puranic literature was designed primarily for oral transmission but with one absolute reservation: the Vedic text could not be changed in the slightest detail for transmission. Not only the Vedic content, but every word, sound and accent was sacred. The Epics and the Puranas, on the other hand, continuously evolved and underwent addition and alteration. The Vedic word was not merely a signifier, it was the signified: the word was the deity or the body of the deity and could, therefore, be received only by the highly trained and disciplined mind.

Since these two categories were regarded as creations of the universal mind, they were not treated as poetry (*kavya*). It was the sage Valmiki who first set his mind upon writing a poem of his own on a character of the here-and-now. For this reason the *Ramayana* is known as the first poem (*adikavya*). One may deduce that the first poem is a combined product of two types of uses of the word, one compressed, the other diffused; also of two types of address, one to the initiate and the other to the common man. The *Ramayana* also has two distinct objectives: the realisation of the divine and the realisation of the human existence.

This point, however, can be over-stretched. It has to be borne in mind that the Vedic-Epic-Puranic literature contains not only the seeds of poetry but well-wrought and structured pieces of poetry as well, though both functionally and structurally the works of this body of tradition are not predominently poetry. Vedic literature is a huge mass of hymns, ritual formulate, ritual musical compositions, exegeses, dialogues and legends; also of grammar, etymology, phonetics, astronomy, prosody and the science of rituals. The hymns form the main body; the rest are the subsidiary body of Vedic literature (*Vedanga*). An understanding of this intricate network, of a mainstream together with subsidiary streams, is necessary for the comprehension of the totality of intellectual activity in the composition of Vedic literature.

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The main component is again divided into four layers: the *Samhita* or the *Mantra* literature, regarded as an instrument of thought; the *Brahmana* exegetic literature (which explains not only the proper order or function of particular ritual acts but also creates an imaginary semiotic framework); *Aranayaka* literature (so called because composed by forest-dwelling ascetics) which represents an inquiry into the spiritual purpose of a ritual act; and lastly, the *Upanishad* literally 'acquired by sitting near a *Guru'*, in other words, 'knowledge acquired through mystic initiation'. This last class of literature is also called the *Vedanta* or the finale of Vedic lore and is a collection of philosophical dialogues and metaphysical exploration.

It was earlier believed that these four layers represented chronological stages, but this rather mechanistic concept of the history of Vedic literature has been discredited by later research which has clearly demonstrated that there is a considerable chronological overlap, *e.g.*, parts of the *Atharva Samhita* are, thematically and stylistically, coeval with the *Upanishads*. Similarly, the *Yajus Samhita* is an inseparable mass of *Mantra* and *Brahmana;* the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* is, as the name itself shows, both an *Aranyaka* and an *Upanishad*. The parts of the Vedic literature should thus be seen as limbs or layers rather than stages of growth.

The *Mantra* is again conceived as four-fold: the *Rg,* the *Sama,* the *Yajus,* and the *Atharva* Veda, containing respectively hymns of the glory of the gods (*Rgveda*), musical composition of these hymns (*Samaveda*), the sacrificial linkages of the hymnal (*Yajurveda*) and a miscellany of spells, charms, mystic visions and experiences and celebrations of the joys and sorrows of daily life (*Atharvaveda*). The composition of the *Samhitas* is ascribed a period extending from about 4000 B.C. to 1500 B.C., whereas the other three layers are ascribed a period between 2000 B.C. and 500 B.C.

Only the first and the fourth component of this body of

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literature are in verse form. The language, style and metrics show such a profound qualitative change that it is incomprehensible to limit the entire composition to a span of eight hundred years as done by Max Mueller or Macdonnell. There is a wide divergence of structures, a great variety of strains, different frames of reference in terms of heirarchy of gods and in terms of attitudes towards life. We move from the concept of a power-centered godhead to a grace-centred godhead and from a bright life-celebrating optimism to a pensive pessimism. The I-Thou dialogue stance gives way to a reflective first person posture or a third person statement. Yet, in spite of this variety, there is an inherent unity which may be regarded as the unity of divine purpose, since the entire literature serves as an instrument of the transformation of man into a divinity and *vice versa*. It must be clearly realised that, unlike the gods of the Greek pantheon, Vedic gods join hands with man in fulfilling a higher purpose in the re-enactment of creation and the direct experience of truth, which alone holds the universe. The whole truth is always a mystery and a challenge; so the quest goes forever deeper; the deeper it goes the greater significance is attached to the commonest experience of everyday life because everything becomes charged with the spark of an all-embracing, all-comprehending, all-permeating consciousness.

Epics & *Puranas*

Parallel to the body of literature described above, which might be called the poetry of transcendence, was the evolution of an eulogical form concerned with man and his lineage—a kind of ballad. These *narasamsi gathas* ('ballads in praise of ancestors') were sung on the occasion of a *sraddha* or post-funeral rite by a special class of bards. Whereas the Vedic *mantras* or hymns all bear the stamp of an individual seer or sage (*rshi*) as well as a deity or a number of inter-related deities, the ballads were anonymous and passed from generation to generation. These two parallel streams of mnemonically preserved tradition converged, as already observed, in the Epics and *Puranas*.

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The *Mahabharata* as well as the *Puranas* frequently refer to older *gathas,* but they are not themselves ballads. Drawing inspiration from the *gathas* in the matter of theme as well as form, they serve the double purpose of raising a vast edifice of mythology on the compactly recorded Vedic experience and of creating a secular tradition in a memorisable form.

Though the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are usually ascribed dates between the 4th century B.C. and the 4th century A.D., the *Mahabharata* often being ascribed a date earlier than the *Ramayana,* the kernel of the two epics must be much older. Both epics were recited on specified occasions and in a prescribed manner to lay audiences and must have undergone many additions and alterations. The present versions probably crystallized between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. The tradition holds that the writing down of the epics (as well as the compilation of the four Vedic *Samhitas* and the eighteen *Puranas*) was done by one and the same person, Krishna Dvaipayana (literally, 'the dark one born on an island'), who, because of this achievement, is also called Vyasa ('the expounder') or Vedavyasa.

The tradition also holds that Valmiki was the predecessor of Vyasa. Incidentally both Valmiki and Vyasa are not only witnesses or narrators of certain events but participants, being personally involved in the lives and destinies of their characters. The tradition also holds that *itihasa* and *purana* together provide the perspective for a fuller understanding of the esoteric content of the Vedas.

Western scholars have, unfortunately, tended to confine themselves to relative chronology based on philological analysis often ending in speculation rather than history and, in any case, losing sight of the real aim of a study of traditional literatures. Surely the understanding of purpose and the recognition of the roots of creativity should be more important than chronology.

Looking at the experience of Epic-Purnaic literature

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composed over fourteen centuries (upto 12th century A.D.), we find an amazing structural unity throughout, the only difference between the Epics and the *Puranas* being the marked emphasis on a central figure and a central legend in the Epics —in the *Puranas* the treatment is somewhat more diffused. (The *Bhagavata Purana* is an exception in that here Krishna is the central figure and his life-story the central theme.) By and large the dominant metre is the *Anushtubh,* and the devices for opening and closing the story are the same in different works. They commence with a posed question and end in an eulogy of the work and a benediction on the listener who has acquired merit through the unbroken experience of regulated audition.

Not only are the eighteen *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* all ascribed to one author, Vyasa; they are also collectively referred to as 'the Fifth Veda' or the 'People's Veda' (*Lokaveda*). This has a direct bearing on the common purpose of these works; it also singles out the *Ramayana* as distinctive and different. The 'Fifth Veda' is an extension of the Vedas, while the *Ramayana* is an independent poetic composition— the first poem (*adi-kavya*).

The *Ramayana* presents the vast dramatic conflict between right and wrong or good and evil, both unambiguously recognised. The *Mahabharata* shows deep concern for the destiny of man and a profoundly sympathetic understanding of man's failure. Both epics end on a sad note. Rama exiles Sita, for whom he had fought and won a terrific battle with Ravana: the poet himself is not convinced of the grounds on which Sita is exiled. The *Mahabharata* ends even more sombrely: a whole generation of heroic souls, victors had vanquished together, ravaged by war.

Critics in the West have often remarked on a lack of the tragic sense and consequently of depth in Sanskrit literature. They have failed to see that the Indian idea of tragedy is quite different: the sense of tragedy resides not in the defeat and frustration of man thwarted by jealous gods but in the sense of remorse at man's own wrong decisions. Thus what is

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important is not premonition or prediction or unsuccessful attempts to bypass them; tragic significance resides in the tense moment of indecision itself.

The two epics together present the eternal possibility of re-enacting the drama of conflict, not only between good and evil but also between the lesser good and the greater. These works, together with the *Puranas*, with the sole exception of the *Bhagavata Purana,* present a four-fold hierarchy of values, *dharma* (right action) being the core, followed by *artha* (the effort to provide the means), *kama* (the desire for worldly enjoyment) and finally *moksha* (eternal liberation from bondage). The last of these is usually an unrealised though continually sought-for goal, while *dharma* is man's obligation to his universe (comprising his family, his gods), his heritage, his age and his total environment). Though basic, *dharma* is not so much a prescription as a challenge; *dharma* is *one* but not *uniform.*

Bhagavata Purana

The *Bhagavata Purana,* as already indicated, stands on a different footing. Evidence shows that there was always an undercurrent of mystic yearning from the earliest Vedic times; to this was added the fervour of *Bhakti,* which from being a means slowly emerged as the highest goal, the-end-in-itself. Historically this emergence can be seen as the wearing down of rigid Vedic discipline and the awakening of the non-elite through a succession of folk movements. As a further development, we see the emergence of the ideal of voluntary service, a self-chosen bondage for the sake of those who are in bondage, the search for joy in universalized pain—the ideal of individual self-liberation paled into insignificance before this self-abnegation and surrender.

The *Bhagavata Purana* thus ushers a new hierarchy of values which dominate pre-medieval and medieval poetry. Life in the here-and-now is regarded as meaningful only when enlivened by a universal presence directly perceived in love

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and compassion. The *Bhagavata Purana* (composed 6th-8th Century A.D.) presents a happy synthesis between different traditions, indicating continuous inter-play between intellect and passion, between acceptance and rejection, between surrender and renunciation—in short, between 'the great tradition' and 'the little tradition'.

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'Kavya' Literature

Before coming to a consideration of what may properly be regarded as creative literature in the present-day sense, one more point has to be made. A large part of Puranic literature, as extant today, is contemporaneous with the early and pre-medieval epoch of poetic literature from Kalidasa to Jayadeva. That legendary material should be common to both is easily understandable. There was a continuous growth of legends, almost all the *Puranas* having existed in kernel form from long before. But what is surprising is that except for the *Bhagavata* almost all the *Puranas* are conspicuously different and distinctive in form and style from the poetic literature, whereas the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (here particularly the *Ramayana*), have a poetic character not much different from the works of poets like Kalidasa, even though they were composed much earlier than the entire poetic literature. Kalidasa and Asvaghosha appear direct descendants of Valmiki in respect of diction and texture. We may, therefore, conclude that the Indian poetic tradition emanates in its full form from Valmiki and Vyasa, though the seeds of the tradition lie in the Vedic hymns and Upanishadic parables and mystic utterances, the *Puranas* providing new material by way of myths and symbols and narratives of events and descriptions of ways of life. The *Puranas* also served another purpose. Through the simple language they provided easy access to the well-crafted and sophisticated language of Sanskrit poetry when the *Prakrits* came into the foreground. The *Puranas* were thus an intermediary between the *Prakrits* and the highly-wrought and accomplished Sanskrit of the *kavyas*.

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This *kavya* literature can be divided into four sub-groups (i) epic poetry (ii) drama (iii) lyric and gnomic poetry and (iv) fables and stories in prose. The first, second and last sub-groups draw largely upon common material and have more or less similarly structured plots, though, of course, there are certain notable differences. The epic has many descriptive passages; the prose tale has more straighforward narrative; drama obviously cannot indulge in either. But all of them together (including the prose story) may be regarded as 'poetic literature' since they all have one central *rasa,* one dominant transformation of one particular sentiment, though technically one would differentiate poetry by its metrical form. To the non-traditional reader the descriptive passages in the longer poem or even in the prose romance may seem irrelevant and out of place; but they provide the keynote of the aesthetic unity of these works.

The evolution of the third sub-group of lyric and gnomic poetry was due largely to give a musical form to poetic statement—to provide compositions which could be presented in song. Later these true lyrics and sung gnomic verses fused into one form which came to be called *muktaka* ('self-contained', the autonomous stanza-poem). This form was strongly influenced by the folk tradition of unlettered song and the structure of the Sanskrit *muktaka* has much in common with the Prakrit *muktaka.* Conversely, Prakrit epic and Prakrit drama followed the lead of Sanskrit and adopted the same format with descriptions of seasons, of sports, of aspects of nature and of man's predicament.

This continuous exchange of forms and techniques as well as motifs between Sanskrit and Prakrit benefited both languages and helped in evolving one poetic tradition—a tradition at once mundane and other-worldly, comprehending with equal ease the ascetic's hermitage, the farmer's cottage and the king's court, idealising the hero but not losing sight of the bizarre, the ludicrous or even the depraved. It is for this reason that the divisions into 'didactic', 'ascetic', 'erotic' or 'heroic' cease to have intrinsic value and can at best be a

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convenient label.

The classical epic was a recrystallisation of a poetic form from the earlier epic which, as already pointed out, was not only a poem by design but several things together. The *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas,* though conceived poetically and composed metrically, were the repositaries of the code of righteousness (*dharma*) as well as of a body of material supporting or illustrating that code. The classical epic poem was essentially a poem: the poetry itself was the *dharma* which provided release, however brief, from every bondage except the laws of poetry. The conceptual framework is, therefore, more compact and cohesive; there is also a search for perfection of form.

Classical Sanskrit Poetry

Bhasa, Kalidasa and Asvaghosha stand apart from other poets of the classical epic in exhibiting two main characteristics of the *Ramayana:* simplicity and sublimity. Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa* takes its theme from the *Ramayana* and even the *Meghaduta* draws inspiration from the same source. His *Kumarasambhavam* draws its material from an earlier version of the *Vayu Purana.* The source for Kalidasa's dramatic themes, however, is eminently the *Mahabharata,* though his *Malavikagnimitram* has a historical figure, the king Agnimitra, for its hero. Asvaghosha picked his theme from the Buddha lore in Pali or in the hybrid Buddhistic Sanskrit. Bhasa drew his dramatic themes from the *Mahabharata,* the *Ramayana* and from popular lore.

The chronology of Asvaghosa and Kalidasa is still a matter of controversy. A large number of strikingly similar expressions in both poets has led to speculation, sometimes wild, regarding the primacy of one or the other. The date of Asvaghosha is more or less fixed as his association with Kanishka is established beyond doubt: he can be placed in the 1st Cent. A.D. Dates for Kalidasa range between the 1st Cent. B.C. and the 4th Cent. A.D., most scholars accepting the

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earlier date.

The similarly of expressions in the work of the two poets need not necessarily be a result of borrowing by the one from the other. In a situation where all literature was orally preserved, striking poetic phrases and motifs easily became a part of a collective memory, a repository from which poets of different regions and periods drew freely, recharging the material with a new significance. In any case, whether Kalidasa was a predecessor of Asvaghosha or not, there is no doubt whatsoever that he is the more accomplished poet: his handling of his material shows a much more developed aesthetic sensibility and a higher degree of sophistication.

Despite Kalidasa's undoubted superiority, there is one quality common to both poets which sets them apart from others in the classical tradition. They are not restricted by any prescribed format as their successors are, nor do they indulge in word-play for its own sake. Bharavi (5th-6th Cent. A.D.), Magha (early 7th Cent. A.D.) and Sri Harsha (12th Cent. A.D.) show much concern with embellishment and ornamentation and frequently indulge in poetic jugglery They also conform with a set pattern for the *mahakavya*—the longer narrative poem. This pattern prescribes that the *mahakavya* should have a hero of sublime character, that it should contain a description of the cycle of seasons, another of a forest or a waterside sport, also descriptions of sunrise, sunset and moonrise, of the beauty of the human (particularly the feminine) body and of animate and inanimate life. The effort to conform to this pattern results in a looseness of the structure: the different descriptions appear to be independent compositions assembled together. Kalidasa and Asvaghosha also provide examples of such descriptions, but in their case they are fused into the structure and are an organic part of the narrative. Presumably, it was their work which provided the model for later poets who unfortunately followed it in a rigidly formalistic manner. As we move away from the two great early poets, we perceive a gradual but continuous decay of the epic narrative form.

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Fortunately, however, the decay is limited to that one form only; Sanskrit drama, lyric and gnomic poetry and prose (or mixed) story and fable show a vigorous growth during the same period. The reason for this was the strong impact of the Prakrit and the Old Tamil literary traditions. It is understandable that in a society in which the oral tradition dominated, it would be the folk sub-stratum which would continually infuse new life into all creative activity: a socially upward-moving thrust which would counter-balance the reverse flow of formalistic and scholastic ideas. Such interaction is a conspicuous part of the Indian poetic tradition and poet-teachers have sometimes even advised aspiring poets to open themselves to this two-way flow.

The simple serenity of the records of the experience of newly initiated Buddhist monks and nuns (*Theragatha* and *Therigatha*) is reflected in passages in Sanskrit epics and drama, depicting the ascetic life. The use of colloquial idiom or nuance, characteristic of Tamil and Prakrit gnomic verse and lyric poetry, results in a mode of expression quite different from that of the epic. Nor is the impact limited to language, affecting also theme, content and mood. Rural living, everyday situations and relationships, common joys, temptations and sufferings and human caprice were all brought into the material for poetry.

Sanskrit drama had a very significant place for Prakrit dialects in its design and structure. It was not that Sanskrit plays were meant to be enjoyed by an elite audience and that the use of dialects was limited to characters taken from the lower orders of society. The intended audience was definitely bilingual, also familiar with stage conventions and possessing a degree of aesthetic initiation. The audience also had access to a vast storehouse of oral lore and legend, ballad and song, shared by different levels of society. The characters in a Sanskrit play were not new or created by the dramatist's imagination; nor was the plot an entirely new one. The

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material used for the play was already familiar in some degree but the presentation made it new, striking new chords of emotion Bhavabhuti's *Uttara-Pama-Carita* provides the most remarkable example of this process of renewal and re-creation. While presenting the familiar story of Rama, it shifts the emotional centre from wonder, heroism and love to pathos: the play is a poignant presentation of the human predicament and the dignity and fortitude of womanhood in misfortune and suffering. Bhavabhuti shows not only great originality and ingeniousness in the design and construction of the play, but a profound understanding of the collective consciousness of his intended audience, from which he draws so deeply.

Sanskrit Lyric

The lyric verses of Amaru or the gnomic verses of Bhartrhari as well as the terse epigrams of later poets show, together with their accomplishment, their sophistication and their economy resulting from an absolute mastery of language, the strong feel of the soil and the life and lore of the common people.

Prakrit: The *Gathas*

The Sanskrit fable also drew largely upon folklore. The *Kathasaritsagara* by Somadeva (11th Cent. A.D.), which became a fountainhead of tales and motifs for generations of story-tellers, was itself deeply indebted to the work of Gunadhya who may be regarded as the prime source of a vast body of story material which travelled widely not only throughout India but even to West Asia and beyond. There is an interesting legend connected with Gunadhya's life and work. Disgraced by his royal Satavahana patron for his inability to correctly paraphrase a Sanskrit sentence, Gunadhya was banished from the kingdom and deprived of the right to use Sanskrit. He spent his exile in the forests of the Vindhyas, collecting material from forest-dwelling tribes and composing strings of tales 'in the language of the Pisacas (evil spirits)'. The legend tells us that only one-seventh of Gunadhya's work has survived and that too in three different

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Sanskrit versions, the most important being the *Kathasarit-sagara* referred to above. This legend may or may not have a base in historical fact, but it is established beyond doubt that the language and lore of the masses was a rich repository of oral literature and a perennial source of inspiration to poets and dramatists. There is also epigraphical evidence to establish that Brahmana rulers like the Satavahanas patronised Prakrit and one of them, Hala, compiled verses by a number of Prakrit poets and poetesses into the most important anthology of its kind. These verses, all in the *gatha* metre, though often presenting tableau-like situations, were essentially meant for musical presentation. It is significant that most of the couplets occurring in Sanskrit plays (and carrying a specific direction for musical rendering) are lyric compositions in this metre. The first line of the *gatha* couplet, being longer in measure than the second one, musical rendering calls for alternation of slower and faster rhythms.

Gathas (or *Gaha* in Prakrit) reflect a very diversified socio-cultural milieu, ranging from the sophisticated court or city to the village, the forest and the tribal hamlet. Critics often call this literature secular and sometimes even erotic poetry; but this is a misrepresentation because the *gathas* often have deep religious overtones, referring to religious literature and myth and paying homage to deities like Siva-Parvati, Vishnu-Lakshmi and Krishna. A large number of *gahas* do centre round the man-woman relationship, but few are concerned specifically with the sexual act, concentrating rather on the moods and sentiments of young love, the yearning for companionship, the pangs of jealousy and the ecstasy of meeting. They also present vivid pictures of the wild and boisterous side of nature—the tempestuous rain or the misery of winter, the wild boar, the charging bison, the fun and frolic of a rustic festival. Viewed as a whole, they present a picture of the totality of life and the sense of fulfilment which filters through also to Sanskrit poetry and drama.

Narrative Prose & Verse

Dandin (6th Cent. A.D.) composed a prose romance

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Dasakumaracarita, a characteristic chain of ten stories depicting the life of tricksters, thieves and philanderers. Sudraka's play *Mrcchakatika* (4th-5th Cent. A.D.), well known in translation as 'The Clay Cart' presents in sharp realistic scenes the hypocrisy and corruption of the socio-political set-up of the age. The picture is supplemented by Damodaragupta's *Kuttinimatam* (9th Cent. A.D.) which not only depicts the life of the courtesan but comments with wry cynicism on contemporary society. Kshemendra etches in further details of this sordid picture in his *Narmamala* and *Desopadesa* with graphic descriptions of unctuous bureaucrats, sham scholars, fake holymen, bogus artists and charlatans of various other sorts.

Apabhramsa Poetry

Under the influence of the sophistication and rhetorical accomplishment of Sanskrit works, Bhakti poetry also becomes more compact and at times stylized. Apabhramsa poetry (starting from the late 6th Cent. and extending over eight centuries) follows the lyric tradition of Prakrit on the one hand but on the other presents new themes (or rather refurbished old themes), such as, mysticism, acts of chivalry, the rigors of asceticism. Apabhramsa poetry also in certain sense completes the circle, rejuvenating the epic form. The Apabhramsa epic is a fusion of the dialogue-type narration of the *Puranas* and the fictional tale (*Akhyayika*) on the one hand and of the Sanskrit epic and the bardic narrative on the other. The riddle-like or hyperbolic compositions of the Siddhas (Buddhist monks of the Vajrayana Order) similarly brought to Apabhramsa the pointedness of the Upanishadic parable.

The Apabhramsa language was extensively used in folk theatre and this had its impact on the classic tradition also. In fact Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda* (12th Cent. A.D.) composed in mellifluous Sanskrit, is an operatic composition to be used as the *libretto* at a dance recital: a classic transformation of the popular Apabhramsa theatrical form.

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Apart from these movements in the language and sensibility, contributing to the continuity of the Indian tradition, one other very important movement has to be mentioned. From the very beginning of the Christian era and perhaps from a few centuries earlier the development of social consciousness and led to a still popular religious movement, which not only de-emphasized ritual observance but placed a high premium on humility of spirit and complete surrender of the individual self before the Universal Being, in whatever form he was visualised—Siva, Vishnu, the Mother Goddess or a personal yet universal Presence like Rama, Krishna, Buddha or Mahavira.

The growing impact of this Bhakti movement was expressed in a burning desire for total identification with the overpowering universal presence. The concept of the *avatara* (descent or incarnation) and of *lila* (divine sport) to a great extent replaced the fixed idea of a godhead and of *maya* (appearance or manifestation). *Lila* is the manifestation of the Descended Presence in the world of perception: in other words, it is an eternalization of the evanascent mortal life. The preoccupation with the search for unity with the universal presence pushed the individual's struggle for freedom from bondage into insignificance but compensated for this loss of social purpose by the voluntary choice of poverty and the readiness to share the life of the common people. The Bhakti movement produced a large body of *stotra* (prayer) literature composed by Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakta, Buddhist, Jaina devotees, which, on the one hand, celebrated service to the divine and on the other invoked a new poetic image of man (as will be shown later). The individual's search for identity with the universal, creating its complement in the concern of the universal for the fulfilment of the individual, resulted in giving love and compassion the profoundest significance in the predicament of man.

Having sprung from the masses, this movement first took

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shape in different popular regional literary forms, merging gradually to form the vital force in the mainstream of Sanskrit literature.

Again in this scale of devotional fervour, it was conjugal love which was given the highest place because of its potential intensity and its capacity for total involvement. The *Bhagavata Purana* was the highest expression of this popular movement. As already indicated, it was a happy blend of the intellectual and the devotional approaches as also of Sanskrit and Tamil, classical and folk poetic trends. But even from the time of Asvaghosha and Kalidasa, the Bhakti idea was never lost sight of; gradually it grew in power and with Jayadeva reached a new emotional peak. In the middle centuries Bhakti was the dominant trend, its emotional force transcending all bounds of caste, creed, social status and to some extent even of religious belief.

This non-lineal account of the growth of the Indian poetic tradition should suffice to establish its identity as one stream of continuity and creative consciousness. It is not and was not intended to be a historical survey.

MAN IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Amongst the unifying strands in the Indian poetic tradition, reference was made in the beginning to the Indian world view and the Indian concept of time. It appears desirable—it may perhaps even be necessary—to develop these ideas a little further for the benefit not only of foreign readers to whom these ideas might appear alien, but also some Indian readers who tend to conclude that the Western approach to historicity and the evolutionary notion of man as the biological ape has confined all Indian concepts to limbo.

The Indian tradition does not see the universe as anthropocentric. Nor does it see it as unicentric. There is no contradiction between this and the anthropomorphic visualisation of the cosmos—the *Purusha*. Indeed it is *because* there is a

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polycentric universe that it becomes possible to visualise a number of universal systems living and moving in harmony. In early Vedic thought, it was *tapas,* the primordial creative energy, from which both *satya,* the sustaining truth and *rta* (the dynamic regulative order) emanated. The spinning into being of many worlds followed from the dynamic order. Such a cosmogony would naturally raise questions about the status of the gods. Unlike the Greek gods, the deities of the Indian pantheon are 'the breaths, mind-born, mind-yoked': in them one sacrificed symbolically. To the Greeks the gods were 'superiors', their relation to the gods was legal and religious observations were analogous to civic duties. The Vedic gods, on the other hand, are coparceners in the sacrifice; they stand on an equal footing with the sacrificer. The *yajna* or sacrifice was *a re-enactment* of the primordial sacrifice of all gods. The gods were as much dependent on man as man on the gods, whom he invoked through the creative word, *Vak.* Vedic gods are thus not only not essentially anthropomorphic; they are measured by the latent power of prayer, they are not fixed, changing with the new and the ancient, having both benign and terrifying aspects like man.

Indian thought assumes an inherent correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. "Yonder world is in the likeness of this world as this one is the likeness of that," says the *Aitareya Brahmana.* The Tantric idea further developed this multi-centred concept. Thus in the Indian tradition we do not have the spatial perspective in traditional art nor the historical perspective in literature: man in Indian literature is operating simultaneously on two planes, one situated in time and space and the other transcending both. Time is transcended through projections in progeny (*santana*). Space is transcended through identity not only with nature but with all beings. This is a Becoming which never exhausts itself. According to Abhinava Gupta, the most significant exponent of the Indian aesthetic, Being is neither merely an atemporal visualisation of itself, nor an absolute separation from time and space; it is the realisation of self as a separate identity on one plane and as a potentiality for being involved in time and

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space on the other. In this view history is not rejected but rather transcended; this view modified the primitive cyclic notion of time inasmuch as it is not limited to a process of periodicity of creation and return to the atemporal instant of the beginning. It differs fundamentally from the Western preoccupation with time as history, the notion that life and reality are history and history alone human. In Indian literature human existence is at the same time atemporal and timeless and temporal or placed in time; in Western thought man is historically situated and human existence is charged with significance for man because human life is under the shadow of time.

The Sanskrit word analogous to history, *itihasa,* has already been mentioned. Since *itihasa* does not assert "so it was" but only reminds us that "so it has been", in the Indian view the "so it was" aspect remains neither relevant nor real: the most it can achieve is to simulate one point in a continuum, whereas the "so it has been" view remains continuously relevant and real. It is easy to dismiss this view as an anachronism and Western scholars invariably do so, but it should be realised that this 'traditional' attitude towards history makes Indian society a tradition-bound but free society—free from inhibitions of race, creed, nationality and derivatively also from historical obligations. The obligations that survive are to the Cosmic Being at one end and to the immediate ancestors or progenitors at the other, between the two extremeties being the obligations to the search for truth and the dynamism of the cosmos.

For man's preoccupation with Narayana, All-Man, does not absolve him from his social obligations. Man is born with a four-fold obligation: the obligation to the ancestors (fulfilled through the life of the householder carrying forward the tradition of the family), the obligation to the sages and to wisdom (fulfilled through a life devoted to the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and truth), the obligation to the gods (fulfilled through a life withdrawn into oneself and dedicated to the divine) and finally the obligation to all beings, man

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included of course, (fulfilled through a life emptying itself for the fulfilment of the surrounding void—a life pulsating with the All-Breath rather than one's own breathing). This transit in four stages of life, from a distinct private home to no home, is neither incongruous nor beset with any inner contradictions: on the contrary it is a clear formulation of a course culminating in a profound reverence for the nebulous universe, for the immeasurable infinite, the great ground of the seed of creation, the cosmic waters of the unmanifest, the ultimate in the abstraction, the universalisation and comprehension of the unknown.

This great reverence for the universe, this perpetual identification of things create and uncreate with Being and Becoming, finds vivid expression in myth, symbol and motif not only in Indian literature but in every Indian art. Thus lotus and swan as a motif in Indian art, fire and water in Hindu ritual, *Nara* and *Narayana* in Indian mythology and light and sound in Indian *sadhana* may be seen as representations of the linking and inter-weaving of seeming extremes. There is no incongruity because it is not *Nara* alone who is dependent on Narayana; the latter has to descend and incarnate himself to fulfil his obligation to man in his service. The *Bhakti* movement in medieval days gradually led to a deification of the human body, presenting it as coveted even by the gods because through it alone could a human relationship be established between man and the Universal Being. This may appear a great change from Valmiki's sublime hero, the *Purushottama,* 'whom even the gods feared', but there was no basic opposition because even the earlier image of the epic hero was of a man of overwhelming compassion: it was this quality which could transcend the divine order that the gods feared. Even to Yudhishthira, the *Mahabharata* hero, compassion is the greatest virtue. It is compassion which impregnates the lowliest of the lowly with the seed of the greatness of the great. It transcends hierarchies of caste, class, creed, age and personal achievement, all achievement other than the realisation of the sublime truth that final imancipation for the individual has no meaning: one must of one's own accord be

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able to choose to dispel the darkness enveloping all other beings even at the cost of personal imancipation. This concept of what might be called the humanism of *Bhakti* is in extreme contrast to the renaissance humanism of the West, a distinction which must be fully understood. "*Moksha* or freedom is both individual and universal; it is the freedom of the *dharma* of every man through the sacrifice of that very *dharma* in the *dharma* of the community and through the community in the *dharma* of the whole created world; and this leads to perfect liberation and freedom of the spirit (as well as of the body), in which man pores himself unstintingly into the one ocean of Truth, which is at once both the fire and the All." Such a concept is 'non-humanistic' only insofar as it is not confined to the individual or to a particularly defined group of individuals, refusing to succumb to the hopelessness of bondage to historical obligations.

It may easily be inferred from this that in the Indian tradition a special relationship exists between man and nature: nature may be regarded as the external projection of man and conversely man himself may be regarded as a projection of nature. This relationship also finds repeated expression not only in Indian poetry but in other arts as well.

It must also be noted that in this framework of thought there is a significant difference between the concept of society and *loka:* the latter comprises the totality of perceptible existence and man's commitment to it, therefore, ceases to be limited to human society but comprehends and encompasses it.

This introduction to the Indian ethos should provide an adequate basis for the appreciation and enjoyment of the poetic selections presented in the Anthology. India has undergone rapid changes in recent decades; languages have kept pace with the changes and Sanskrit has also seen a considerable decline. But the impress of the language and its culture on the Indian ethos is too deep to be erased: the Anthology will draw strong echoes from Indian readers, even if they have lost

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touch with the literature of the past. For others, the Anthology will, we hope, be a discovery.

S.V.
V.N.M.

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CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF TITLES

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Vedic

Vedic literature comprises the *Samhitas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*. The *Samhitas* consist of the *Rgveda Samhita* (*RV*) having ten *mandalas* or sections, the *Yajurveda Samhita* (*YV*), the *Samaveda Samhita* and the *Atharveda Samhita* (*AV*). A *Samhita* is also called a *Veda* (revealed knowledge) and every Veda has its compendium of *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. The *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* are in prose, but many of the *Upanishads* are in verse. The most prominent among these are the *Katha Upanishad* (*Katha Up.*), the *Kena Upanishad* (*Kena Up.*), the *Isavasya Upanishad* (which is also a part of the *Yajurveda Samhita*), the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (*Svet. Up.*). The chronology of this vast literature extends from the 25th to the 7th Century B.C.

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Epic & Purana

In the Indian tradition, the *Mahabharata* ((*MBh.*) and the *Ramayana* (*Ram.*) are regarded as epics (*itihasa*), the authorship being ascribed respectively to Vyasa and Valmiki. The *Mahabharata* is the story of the struggle between the five sons of Pandu and the hundred sons of the blind king Dhrtrashtra. The Pandavas, led by Yudhishthira, have the support of Krishna, while the Kauravas (the sons of Dhrtarashtra), led by Duryodhana, are supported by the veteran Bhishma, Drona, Karna and the blind king's brother-in-law Sakuni, the evil genius of the Kauravas. Scholars hold the view that the *Mahabharata* had three stages of growth—Jaya (800 verses), Bharata (24,000 verses) and Mahabharata (100,000 verses). The kernel story is believed to have been composed in the 5th Century B.C., while the enlarged version came into existence between the 2nd Century B.C. and the 2nd Century A.D. It has 18 sections called Parvans (P).

The *Ramayana,* composed by Valmiki, narrates the story of Rama, his exile and his conquest over Ravana, the mightly demon king who had kidnapped Sita, Rama's chaste and devoted wife and the ideal of Indian womanhood. The *Ramayana* has seven sections called *Kandas*. The *Ramayana* is ascribed a date between 400 B.C. and 200 B.C.

Purana literature comprises 18 *Puranas* and 18 minor works (*Upa-Puranas*), all said to be the work of Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata* but in their abstract form obviously compilations of different periods ranging from the 2nd Century B.C. upto the 14th Century A.D. The most important *Puranas* are *Harivamsa, Vayu, Matsya, Kurma, Linga, Vishnu, Bhagavata, Padma, Brahma-vaivarta, Markandeya, Devi Bhagavata, Skanda* and *Vamana.* The *Bhagavata* is the most poetic of all Puranas and also has an imprint of the early Tamil Vaishnava movement (usually ascribed a date between the 6th and the 9th Century A.D.).

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So It Is With Our Bodies (*MBh,* Stri P. 3) ... 85
Against Grieving (*MBh,* Stri P. 2) ... 85
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Illusion (*Anthol.*) ... 88

City in Mourning (*Ram.* II. 106) ... 89
Winter (*Ram.* IV. 5.) ... 91
The Season of Rain (*Ram.* V. 27.) ... 93
Evening Thought (*Anthol.*) ... 96

In Krishna's Absence: A Lament (*Bhagavata* P. X. 90) ... 97

Classical Sanskrit

Kalidasa was the greatest poet of the classical period, during which the Vedic and the Puranic traditions converged. His date is the 1st Cen. B.C. and his provenance Central India. Kalidasa composed four poetical works *Rtu Samhara* (the cycle of seasons), the *Meghaduta* (Megh., the cloud messenger), the *Raghuvansa* (Raghu.), an epic poem dealing with the dynasty of Raghu (of which Rama was the most illustrious descendant), the *Kumara-sambhavam* (*KS*), an epic narrative of the marriage of Siva with Parvati and the

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birth of Kumara, the would-be commander of the army of the gods. Kalidasa also wrote three plays, the *Malavikagnimitram*, the *Vikramorvasiyam* (based on the Vedic legend of Pururava and Urvasi), and the *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* (*Sakun.*). The kernel of the last play is found in the *Mahabharata* story of Dushyanta's love marriage with Sakuntala, foster child of the sage Kanva.

Asvaghosha is the major Buddhist poet, belonging to the period of Kanishka (1st Cent. A.D.). Primarily a philosopher, exponent of Buddhism, he also wrote poetry and drama. The *Buddha Carita* is a long poem on the life of the Buddha; the *Saundarananda* (*Saundar.*) narrates the life of Sundari and Nanda.

Matrceta. After Asvaghosha, the important Buddhist poets who wrote in Sanskrit are Matrceta (3rd-4th Cent. A.D.), Aryasura and Kumaradasa (both 4th Cent. A.D.). Matrceta's *Satapancasatka* is a string of 150 stanzas of prayer addressed to the Buddha.

Bharavi (5th-6th Cent. A.D.), a poet of the early Pallava period, who crystalizes the epic form. Sanskrit critics have praised his choice of works and his ability to suggest depths of meaning. His *Kiraturjinayam* (*Kirat.*) takes an episode from the *Mahabharata*, dealing with Arjuna's penance, followed by a test by Siva in the guise of a tribal hunter (Kirata) who challenges the warrior ascetic to a fight. Arjuna's valour brings him Siva's blessing.

Magha (6th-7th Cent. A.D.), who lived in western India, followed the pattern set by Bharavi in his long narrative poem *Sisupala-vadha* (*Sisup.*), based on another episode from the *Mahabharata*, in which Krishna beheaded the insolent and abusive king Sisupala, an ally of Duryodhana, at a sacrificial ritual performed by Yudhishthira. This long poem is highly regarded for its imagery and its rich diction.

Bhartrhari (6th-7th Cent. A.D.) is said to be the writer of a monumental work on the philosophy of grammar, *Vakyapadiyam*, as well as three collections, each of 100 stanzas, dealing respectively with *Srngara* (songs of love), *Niti* (the moral code) and *Vairagya* (withdrawal).

Amaru (7th Cent. A.D.) may perhaps be regarded as the best lyric poet in Sanskrit. His reputation rests on just one collection of one hundred verses (*Amaru-Sataka*), which has been highly praised for its grace. subtlety and nuance in the depiction of the various moods and situations of love.

Bilhana (12th Cent. A.D.) composed a long narrative poem *Vikramankadevacarita*, a historical panegyric on a Chalukya king, and a string of 50 verses dealing with a clandestine love affair (*Caurapancasika*). According to the legend, the poet himself had been secretly in love with the king's daughter and was condemned to death, to be later pardoned on the ground of such a graceful composition.

Kalhana (12th Cent. A.D.), a great poet-historian, whose *Rajatarangini* (*Raja. T.*) is a remarkable account in verse of the kings of Kashmir. Though narrating history, in the delineating of character Kalhana often displayed flashes of intuitive imagination.

Sri Harsha (12th Cent. A.D.) was a scholarly poet of northern India and wrote a highly embellished longer narrative poem in twenty-two cantos, the *Naishadhiyacarita* (*Naish. C.*), dealing with the story of Nala and Damayanti, another Mahabharata episode.

Jayadeva (12th Cent. A.D.) is the author of the intensely lyrical and operatic *Gita Govinda* (*Gita G.*). Its twelve sequences are still very popular and frequently performed both on the musical and the dance stage.

Kshemendra (13th Cent.), a versatile scholar and a highly sophisticated poet, who authored several works on Sanskrit poets and the training of the poets, witty and sarcastic verses on contemporary modes and manners and even bawdy verses in a pungent idiom. He also composed an adaptation of the *Brihat Katha* of Gunadhya. His *Samaya Matrka* (*Samaya M.*) incorporates witty and perspicacious observations on men and mores through the mouth of a madam who impersonates an aristocratic mother to establish a young woman into the society.

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Jagannatha (17th Cent. A.D.) was associated with the court of the Mughal emperor Shahjahan. A highly accomplished rhetorician and scholar, often referred to as Pandita Raja, he was also a fine lyric poet. His most famous work, *Bhamini Vilasa* (*Bham. Vil.*) is divided into four parts—*Anyokti* (Allegory), *Srngara* (love), *Karuna* (the sentiment of compassion) and *Bhakti* (devotion).

Kalidasa	:	Birth of Parvati (*KS*, I)	... 99
,,	:	The Young Parvati (*KS*, I)	... 100
,,	:	Advent of Spring (*KS*, III)	... 131
,,	:	Parvati's Beauty (*KS*, III)	... 102
,,	:	Siva In Meditation (*KS*, III)	... 102
,,	:	Rati's Lament for Kama (*KS*, IV)	... 103
,,	:	Parvati's Penance (*KS*, V)	... 104
,,	:	The Bride (*KS*, VII)	... 105
,,	:	Nightfall (*KS*, VIII)	... 106
,,	:	Moonrise (*KS*, VIII)	... 107
,,	:	Aja's Lament (*Raghu.*, VIII)	... 108
,,	:	The Foresaken City (*Raghu.*, XVI)	... 109
,,	:	Deer Hunt (*Sakun.*, I)	... 111
,,	:	Speed (*Sakun.*, I)	... 111
,,	:	Young Tree (*Sakun.*, I)	... 111
,,	:	Sakuntala Watering the Plants (*Sakun.*, I)	... 112
,,	:	Cry from Very Deep (*Sakun.*, V)	... 112
,,	:	Descent From Heaven (*Sakun.*, VII)	... 112
,,	:	City-Man—Woodsman (*Sakun.*, V)	... 112
,,	:	Moonrise (*Vikram.*, III)	... 113
,,	:	The Demented King (*Vikram.*, IV)	... 113
,,	:	Flower (*Vikram.*, IV)	... 114
,,	:	The City of the Yaksha (*Megha.*, II)	... 114
,,	:	The Yaksha's Wife (*Megha.*, II)	... 115
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Asvaghosha	:	Sundari and Nanda (*Saund.*, IV)	... 117
Matrceta	:	Praising Buddha (*Satapancashatka*)	... 119
Bharavi	:	In Praise of Well Shaped Speech (*Kirat.*, II)	... 122
,,	:	The Water Play: Gandharvas and Apsaras (*Kirat.*, VIII)	... 122
,,	:	In Praise of Good Words (*Kirat.*, XIV)	... 124
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,,	:	The Incurable (*Niti Satakam*) ...	129
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,,	:	Finesse (*Niti Satakam*) ...	130
,,	:	The Servant's Problem (*Niti Satakam*) ...	130
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,,	:	Ingenue (*Satakam*, 11) ...	131
,,	:	Journey of a Hundred Days (*Satakam*, 12) ...	131
,,	:	The Unrelenting Woman (*Satakam*, 14) ...	132
,,	:	Finesse (*Satakam*, 18) ...	132
,,	:	Transition (*Satakam*, 24) ...	132
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,,	:	Definition (*Satakam*, 32) ...	133
,,	:	History (*Satakam*, 38) ...	133
,,	:	Meeting (*Satakam*, 44) ...	134
,,	:	Change (*Satakam*, 69) ...	134
,,	:	The Vigil (*Satakam*, 76) ...	134
,,	:	Ruse (*Satakam*, 77) ...	134
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,,	:	The Prostitute's Friends (*Samaya-M.*, V) ...	149
,,	:	The Ageing Whore (*Anthol.*) ...	149
,,	:	Court Scribe (*Anthol.*) ...	150
,,	:	Fake Scholar (*Anthol.*) ...	150
,,	:	Bawdy Verses (*Anthol.*) ...	150
,	:	Reasons for Survival (*Anthol.*) ...	151
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,,	:	A Word of Warning to the Soul (*Bham. Vil.*)...	152

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The Dramatists

Bhasa (2nd Cent. B.C.), the first major dramatist and a predecessor of Kalidasa, wrote a number of plays, which have been found very suitable even for contemporary audiences. His most important plays are *Carudatta* (*Caru.*), which later was the source of Sudraka's longer play, *Mrcchakatika,* the *Dutavakyam,* the *Svapna-Vasavdattam* (*Svapna. V.*), the *Panca-ratram* (*Panca*), the *Karnabhara* (*Karnabh.*) and the *Urubhanga.* Most of his themes are from the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata.* Two plays are based on the story of Udayana, king of Kausambi and a contemporary of Buddha.

Sudraka (2nd-3rd Cent. A.D.) is said to have been a king of the Satavahana dynasty. His *Mrcchakatika* (*Mrcch.*) well-known to readers in translation (The Clay Cart), is the story of the love of an impoverished Brahmana for a famous courtesan. The play has some remarkably realistic scenes and also presents a revealing picture of society.

Harshvardhana was a famous king of Kannauja and the patron of Banabhatta, the author of *Kadambari*, a masterpiece of Sanskrit prose. Harshavardhana wrote three plays, two of them being on the Udayana story and one on the Buddhist legend. The most famous of these is *Ratnavali* (*Ratnav.*)

Visakhadatta (6th-7th Cent. A.D.) was the author of *Mudrarakshasa* (*Mudra R.*), a unique drama of political intrigue, based on the historical legend of Chandragupta Maurya and Canakya.

Bhavabhuti (7th Cent. A.D.) wrote two plays on the Rama story, one dealing with Rama's victory over Ravana (*Mahavira Carita*), the other dealing with the later life of Rama, the banishment of Sita and Rama's remorse (*Uttara Rama-Carita* (*URC*). A third play takes up a love story from the *Brhat Katha* and is titled *Malati-Madhavam* (*MM*). Bhavabhuti's plays are highly regarded for their innovative techniques, the poet's deep insight into human psychology and his great respect for womanhood.

Bhattanarayana (8th Cent. A.D.) in his play *Veni-samhara* (*Veni S.*) dramatises an episode from the Mahabharata: Draupadi loosens her hair, vowing that she will only plait them again after washing them with the blood of the Kauravas. This story of vengeance is characterised by violent verbal exchanges between the protagonists.

Damodara Misra (10th Cent. A.D.) wrote a loosely-knit verse play *Hanuman Nataka* (*Hanuman.*) in ten acts, presenting the story of the *Ramayana.*

Bhasa	:	Moonrise (*Caru.*, I)	... 153
,,	:	Flight of Cranes (*Svapna-V.*, IV)	... 153
,,	:	Forest Fire (*Pancar.*, I)	... 153
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,,	:	Darkness (*Mrcch.*, I)	... 155
,,	:	Moon Setting (*Mrcch.*, III)	... 155
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,,	:	Autumn Night (*Mudra-R.*, III)	... 159
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,,	:	Tamasa To Sita (*URC*, III)	... 161
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,,	:	Asvatthama Pledges Vengeance (*Veni-S.*, III)	166
,,	:	Karna's Retort (*Veni-S.*, III)	... 166
Damodara Misra	:	Rama's Lament (*Hanuman.*, IV)	... 167
,,	:	Ravana Brags Before Angada (*Hanuman.*, VII)	167
,,	:	Meghanada's Brag (*Hanuman.*, IX)	... 167

Miscellaneous Verses

Sanskrit gnomic, didactic and lyric verses were preserved in compilations and anthologies made from time to time. These compilations included also aphorisms, epigrams and riddles. Some of the important anthologies (*Anthol.*) are *Sarngadhara-Paddhati*, *Sukti-Muktavali*, *Subhashita-Ratnavali*, *Subhashita-Ratnakosha* and *Subhashita-Ratnabhandagara*. Some verses are found only as citations or examples in works of poetics and rhetoric. What is presented in this section is a representative sampling of themes, moods and conceits.

Bana (6th-7th Cent. A.D.) was a contemporary of Harshvardhana (*q.v.* above) and author of the inimitable prose work Kadambari.

Sankara (7th Cent. A.D.), the great Vedanta philosopher and scholar, is credited with the authorship of many *stotras* and devotional hymns. The *Saundarya Lahari* and the *Ananda Lahari* are works of profound scholarship, the *Carpata Panjarika* (*Carpata* P.) is a more popular *stotra*.

Dharmakirti (8th Cent. A.D.) is a famous Buddhist philosopher.

Anandavardhana (8th Cent.) was the famous proponent of the Dhvani school, author of *Dhvanyaloka*, a major work on poetics.

Abhinavagupta (9th Cent. A.D.) was a versatile genius, poet and rhetorician. His *Abhinava Bharati* (*Abhin. Bh.*), designed as a commentary on Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, is known for its theory of Rasa and has had a profound influence on subsequent poetic theory.

Rajasekhara (10th-11th Cent. A.D.), dramatist, rhetorician and poet, wrote the Prakrit play, *Karpura Manjari*, as also several plays in Sanskrit. His work on practical criticism,

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Kavya Mimamsa, is a well known text. His verses are mentioned chiefly as illustrations in this context.

Other poets in this section are lesser known ones, having no independent works ascribed to them.

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Pali, Prakrit & Apabhramsa

Old Indo-Aryan (Vedic and classical Sanskrit) was historically succeeded by the three stages of Middle Indo-Aryan. The canonical literature of Buddhism (of the Theravada school) is in Pali, assembled into three *Pitakas;* amongst the first of these are two collections comprising self-statements by newly initiated monks and nuns—the *Theragatha* and the *Therigatha.* There are also a number of *suttas* (dialogues), some of considerable poetic beauty.

Prakrit formed the vehicle of the Jaina canon; as also of a body of epic and lyrical poetry of great beauty. The lyrics were compiled into two well-known anthologies: the 'seven hundred verses' of the *Gatha* (or *Gaha*) *Sattasai* which were collected by Hala and which range from the 1st Cent. B.C. to the 4th Cent. A.D., and the *Vajjalaggam.* Prakrit verses are also often quoted in works on poetics.

Three Prakrit epics are well-known: the *Ravanavaho* (the killing of Ravana) by the 4th Cent. Vakataka king Pravarasena, the *Kamsavaho* (the killing of Kamsa) and the *Gaudavaho* (the killing of the Gauda king) by Yasovarman (who was also the patron of the 7th Cent. poet Vakpatiraja).

Apabhramsa, the third phase of Indo-Aryan, covers the transition from the old to the modern Indian languages and produced a varied and extensive literature: lyric, bardic, esoteric (mostly Buddhistic), ascetic (mostly Jaina), and epic. The selections offered here are taken in part from the descriptive grammar of Apabhramsa by Hemachandra (11th Cent. A.D.) and in part from the *Caryapada* verses of the Siddhas (7th-11th Cent.)

(*a*) Pali

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Love Rejoined (,, I) ... 185
Yet Her Fury Slips Away (,, I) ... 185
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Fate (,, II) ... 187
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THE ANTHOLOGY

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VAK: THE SACRED WORD

I am the gold-giving queen of the earth,
I am the knower, the first of those you appease,
The one that the Gods have set in the heart of all things.
I feed you, make light to see by, give something to hear,
For without Me, a man will go down. Here is true faith
For those who can listen; here is what Gods and man
Both look for. He whom I love will be power, be Brahman,
Will see and consider immensely the truth.

Now here is a hater of Brahman. Rudra's great bow
Sings out and he dies. I will save my people, for heaven
And earth are Mine. I bear them both up, and the sea
Is My mother. There is nowhere left My touch does not touch.
I breathe and the worlds come spinning to birth. Not heaven
Or earth sound the floor or top of My reach, or, combined,
Imagine the magnitudes that I keep.

Rig Veda, X.125

TO CREATION

First, there was neither Absence of Being nor Being,
Nor the spacious sprawl of the void overhead.
What kept everything hid? What shut everything in?
Was it the deep and dark waters without an end?

Death was not there; could immortality be?
No night, no day, no line between night and day.
One Thing only breathed in the absence of air;
It breathed of Itself; there was nothing but It to breathe.

It was as if the dark lay lapped in dark,

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Or the face of the flood was blank, or, if not, unformed.
Then heat, the heat of slowly swelling Desire,
Cast the most primal thing on the shore of creation.

Desire it was that lifted out at the start—
That very first seed, thrusting the spirit up,
and Desire that thinkers found as the bridge that led back
From Being to Absence of Being, when they sounded
their hearts.

The first ones to truth marked a line—as of light—that slanted
Through Being and Absence of Being; the dimmest divide
Of under and over. Sentience they seeded and thought,
These sages, free in themselves, strong among things.

Who can say for sure that he knows how it came about,
And, even knowing, can put it rightly in words,
This darkness over creation, behind creation?
Surely the Gods appeared after. But who had begot them?

Surely He knows this secret for He has contrived it.
He controls it from Heaven; He, the first thrust
Of creation, who parted Being and Absence of Being—
Or Maybe He doesn't know what He's done, or how.

Rig Veda, X.129

USHAS: THE DAWN

Of all the lights the lightest, this light has come,
This radiance, conceived in a great dazzle of color,
Rushing ahead of the imminent rise of the sun;
And Night has now given over Her place to the Dawn.

She comes up shining, leading a shining calf.
The Dark One has given over Her mansions to Dawn.
For they are undying kin and follow each other—
Night and the Dawn, exchanging hue for hue.

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They are sisters whose endless road is the very same road,
And they take it as surely as if They were guided by Gods;
No clashing there, no halting for Night or Dawn,
Unlike, yet lovely, and in Their thoughts as one.

Her colors flash out as she leads Her exultant dance;
She has opened her gates for us, and opened them wide;
Revealing the world, She shows us how rich we are.
All of the living open their eyes to the Dawn.

Men who were stretched on the ground, She lifts up to act;
Some rise with the golden thought of wealth as an end,
Some, who see little, go on to gape at what's far.
All of the living open their eyes to the Dawn.

You for conquest, and you for a name in this world,
You arisen to find some momentous good,
You moving off toward a different way to live.
All of the living open their eyes to the Dawn.

Child of the Kingdom of Light, it's to us She comes;
A faultless girl arrayed in Her lustrous robes,
Lady who oversees our earthly goods,
O Dawn, O lucid Portent, shine on us now.

Rig Veda, I.113

TO NIGHT

O Night, Goddess descending, Your multifold eyes
command so much,
O Night, arrayed in Your special lustre.

Undying, filling up empty places, filling up heights and depths,
Containing the dark with Your radiance.

The Goddess, arrived, assumes the seat of Her sister, the Dawn.
And darkness is overwhelmed too.

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Be good to us, Goddess, Whose roads we grope for as refuge,
Like birds that come to their nests in the tree.

Now villagers go toward their homes; all that moves on the
ground or flies is going toward rest,
Even the falcon sharp for prey.

Ward off the she-wolf, ward off the wolf, and the robber.
Be easy for us to pass through, O Night.

You're close to us, Night, investing the dark with a
wealth of hues,
Which You, O Dawn, will redeem like debts.

This is the gift I bring You, O Night, Daughter of
flashing Heaven, bring like a gift of cattle.
Take it, then, as a conqueror takes.

Rig Veda, X.127

AS MUSIC AGREES

Enter here in good order, speak in good order, think in
good order,
As the Gods before, in good order, gathered their gifts.
Let your discourse keep time, your judgments resolve
As a song, the thinker at one with his thought. With this
unanimous prayer
I pray your purpose be one purpose, as one heart
Feels one whole feeling, as one mind thinks one whole thought,
And agree as music agrees.

Rig Veda, X.191

FOR VARUNA

Make a transcendent majestic hymn, delighting to
lordly Varuna,

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That princely hunter who stretched the earth like a skin
under the sun.

Varuna has flung out the air over woods, made the horse go
gallop, the cow to give milk,
Stiffened the heart, set fire under seas, sun in the sky,
and Soma on peaks.

Varuna who tilts the colossal sack to pour it down heaven
and middle air,
Lord of it all, drenching the earth as barley is drenched by rain.

Does He want milk? Varuna moistens the sky, the land, and
the earth to the tip of her roots;
Mountains assume black clouds that are rent by heroic strokes.

It is here we pronounce the terrible arts of the God Who
conceives the whole
Who, standing in middle space, measures out earth and the
sun with His rule.

None has stood in the way of the terrible arts of the God
Who conceives the whole,
Because of Whom rivers, for all their pouring, never can
overflow one sea.

If we have hurt any who did us a good, some friend,
a comrade, a brother,
A neighbor, or stranger, O Varuna, wash us clean of that evil.

If we have cheated as dicers cheat, if we have wronged,
whether blindly or knowing,
Sheer off these evils like chains, Varuna; be loving with us.

Rig Veda, V.85

FOR PARJANYA: BEARER OF RAIN

Conjure up that mighty one with these prayers,

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Bow to Him very low for His favor's sake.
He seeds the green, bellowing like a bull,
Whatever He gives never given in vain.

He smites the trees and they fall, as demons he smites,
go down.
Holding a terrible weapon, He's made the cosmos tremble.
When He flashes out in His wrath at those who are guilty
of evil,
Even the innocent scatter away from His looming presence.

His messengers strain to break out and away, as He lashes
them on
Like a charioteer flogging his horses wildly ahead.
When He swells up space till it's taut with the ponderous
weight of the rain,
A roar is heard, like a thundering lion, even far off.

Winds plunge over the land, lightning leaps through
the tumult.
Stalks shoot up, and heaven is charged, like an udder
with milk.
When the Cloud has proffered His powerfully moving force
to the earth,
The whole of the cosmos is proffered fulfillment in forms
of food.

O Cloud! Over and over the earth bows down,
Hooves beat the ground, dancing for Your delight,
Every green thing grows in Your laws alone.
Give Us, we beg You, shelter under Your greatness.

O, Winds, search out for us the heavenly rains,
Cause the force of that mighty stud to stream;
O, Cloud, come with Your thunderous messenger leading,
To sprinkle Your blessing as father would come to his son.

O, Cloud, resound with all Your mighty thunder,
Mount the green earth, run wild in Your watery chariot.

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Hoist up this bag of water and tip it down
So that peak and pit, all alike, go under the rain.

Heave Your huge bag up the air and spill out its contents,
Open those streams that will spurt down over the whole.
Wet sky and earth with rain as sweet as clear butter,
That all the cows will have more than enough for their thirst.

Enough! You've given enough; hold back
For later. The dusty woods are lovely
To walk in, the plants delicious to eat,
And for these, our thanks, this human hymn.

Rig Veda, V.83

ARANYANI: FOREST SPIRIT

Aranyani, Aranyani, always shifting back and back,
Why do You turn away from the village? It couldn't be fear.

When distant cattle begin to low and the cricket responds,
It is as though Aranyani laughed far off among bells.

Was it She once glimpsed out there, or a shimmer of cows
or some house?
She can shape from the dusk a secret movement of carts.

Her voice is like someone calling the herds, like a falling tree
As it rends, or, to those in the woods after dark, the
remotest wail.

She will not hurt unless someone unkind comes close.
Her food is the fruit in there, and she moves or rests
where she will.

Sweet with the scent of the dark, served without tilling
the ground,
Mother of all wild things: now, I have sung You, Aranyani.

Rig Veda, X.146

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TO PUSHAN: FINDER OF TRAILS

O Pushan, Finder, lead us to Him
Who knows, Who would show us the easy trail,
Plainly pointing—this is that.

May we, by Your willing, discover You now,
Who finds us homes when we are lost,
Plainly pointing—this is that.

The wheel of the Finder never falters,
His seat can never be badly shaken,
His wheel-rims never, cracking, split off.

He never forgets, the Finder, that man
Who offers Him the very best.
For him first the Finder seeks riches.

May He bring in our grazing cattle,
May He be guard for the horses we ride,
May He bring in new goods for us.

See that our cattle does not die,
Keep them from those sizeures that kill.
O, Finder, bring them back to us safe.

We ask You this because You listen,
You are busy seeing that nothing gets lost,
And You are the lord of the growing wealth.

O, Finder, may we never miss
The way You have made for us to follow,
And may we always be these who praise You.

May He, like a friend, always be able
To keep His right hand on our back,
And bring home to us any wealth we have lost.

Rig Veda, VI.54

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THE FROGS HYMN RAIN

The frogs, in repose the whole year,
In strict observance, as if they were priests
Rehearsing their hymns, now open their mouths,
Because this coming of clouds has thrilled them.

The frogs were stuck to the bed of the dried-up pond
As if they were empty sacks, all flattened out,
But when heavenly rain came down, their voices went up
As if from a chorus of calf-bearing cows when they bellow.

With the coming over of rains, the clouds poured down
Their favor on frogs who were yearning with terrible thirst,
And they rushed to each other to greet on this marvelous day,
Their joy as wild as a son's when he meets his parents.

Dazed with delight, they all began to embrace
As they felt on their backs the touch of rushing rain.
The green frog, laughing, rejoiced with his yellow neighbor,
And both began setting the proper pitch for their song.

One frog faithfully follows the tune of the other,
As the pupil, well-trained, repeats the hymn of his master.
Repeating mixed with repeating ripples the pond,
Go on with your singing, frogs, your hymn for joy.

One bellows just like a cow, one bleats like a goat,
This one is wholly green, this one mottled;
All are frogs, but hear how their croakings differ.
And this is the very beauty that makes them a chorus.

As priests crowd round the vessel that holds the Soma
At the climax of one whole night of sacrifice
And begin, exulting, to chant, so the frogs who waited
The whole year out, crowd round the rain-brimming pond.

As chanters, rehearsed in their hymns, sing out to perfection,
So the frogs sing perfectly out their well-practiced song.

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As priests come, dripping with sweat, from pouring libations,
So the frogs come into the open, every last one.

Like the men whose power is sacred words, these frogs
Have kept their vow to be dumb till the day that is fixed
By the Gods in the turn of the year, and, that day arrived,
They are free of burning, burning of year-long control.

The bellow enriches the song, and also the bleat,
The green has poured out his heart for this music, the mottled
His heart; through this fertile song, a hundred cows
Join in the rite where a thousand things are offered.

Rig Veda, VII.103

PURUSHA

A thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet—
the Purusha;
He stands on His ten toes, and covers the whole of the earth.

All things that were, all things to come are only this Purusha,
Lord of expanding life Who grows eternally on
what He consumes.

Most might, and mightier yet the Purusha's sway;
He contains all that's seen in one of His parts; the other
three rest in the realms of light.

Three parts above, and one manifest down here among us,
His reach contains all things that, living, grow, and all
that has no life.

First was born of Him, from Virat, the Purusha's lordship
of Virat.
Once born, He settles in everything on earth—before, behind.

When Gods made sacrifice, the Purusha their offering,

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He was steeped in spring, kindled by summer,
consumed by fall.

It was the first-born Purusha that Gods annointed for offering,
And They with the Sadhyas and sages offered Him up.

Out of infinite flow of that offering, gathered together,
The creatures came, those of the air, those of the woods
and villages came.

Out of that infinite offering sang the Rik and Saman hymns,
The chants were conceived; the Yajus flowed out.

From it the horses galloped, and all who have double jaws,
The cattle paced forth, the goats, the sheep.

When They carved the Purusha up, how were the portions
conceived?
What would His voice be called, the might of His arms, the
huge support of His thighs, the strides He took?

His voice came out as the Brahman, the might of arms went
into the Kshatriya;
Into the Vaisya the huge support of His thighs; the Sudra
came from His strides.

His mind was used for the Moon, the Sun was born
in His eyes;
Indra and Agni sprang from His mouth, and Vayu sprang
from His breath.

His navel was middle air, His head the flashing sky,
His feet the Earth, His ears the directions; thus It was made,
the Whole.

Seven circles enclosed Him, three-times-seven the tiers of fuel
they stacked on His body.
When He, the Purusha, was tied for the offering the Gods
were about to make.

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The Gods, performing that rite, made Him Their gift; this
was the primal accord.
Potent, They thus reached Heaven, the Mansion of Sadhyas,
of ancient Gods.

Rig Veda, X.90

TO PRAJAPATI

At the first there was the Golden Germ,
The only master of all that's created.
He fixed and upholds both earth and heaven,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Who is granter of souls, Who proffers the power,
Who owns this world, and Who commands the Gods;
His shadows are death and the absence of death,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Who, grander than all, was master of all,
Sole Lord of unfolding and furling things,
Of all that goes on two feet or four,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Whose force contains the heights under snow,
The spread of the sea, Whose ground issues life,
Whose arms are the four directions through space,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Who blazes heaven, steadies the earth,
Supports the sky and the seat of the Gods.
Who has measured our middle air,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Who shakes the mind of opposing troops,
Each encouraged by Him, when they see
The sun loom up to dazzle them both,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

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When the first waters were filling up space,
They bore this Germ that held in the fire
Which gave the Gods their original power,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Who scanned, in His might, those waters which bore
The life and brought forth the ritual of power,
God among Gods, the Only alone,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

May He not hurt us, that Maker of Earth,
Of the realms of light, whose Law is the Truth,
Who accomplished the vast unclouded waters,
That unknown God we offer to, loving.

Prajapati! No one but You alone
Can fathom and circle all things ever made.
Grant us what we, invoking You, ask!
Make our measure be very great!

Rig Veda, X.2

SEVEN BIRDS HYMN HER FOREVER

The sages worked at the words as grain is winnowed.
They renounced and, renouncing, they found Her,
Whom seven birds are hymning forever,
She who is seen, and unseen, heard and unheard.
Like a wife in her loveliest silks who shows her form just
To her spouse, She shows Herself only to him She has chosen.

Some drink of her much and wander, staggering, off.
Some think they possess Her, but merely possess Her shadow.

All men have eyes and ears; but deeps are unequal.
You can step in some pools that reach to your throat,
In others get only enough to wet one hand.

Rig Veda, X.71

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FOR PEACE

Now let the earth be still, and the air, the sky,
The waters, the herbs, the trees be still.
And let the gods give me stillness, and quiet come from
these calls for quiet.

With these quiet calls that assuage everything,
I give peace to the terrible here,
To the cruel here, to the evil.
Let them, now quiet, mean well;
Let everything be good to us.

Atharva Veda, XIX.9

HOMAGE TO THE ONE IN MANY

You are that woman, that very man,
You, the boy, and you, the girl,
You, the old one shuffling on with a stick.
Set in this world, You are faced with every mortal direction.

Atharva Veda, X.8

TO THE LIGHTNING

I bow to You, Great Flasher,
Bow to You, Who stuns with thunder,
Bow to the bolt that You surely flash
At stubborn things that do not bow.

I bow to You Who brings to bear
Such heat and such light, swept in

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By a terrible downward lunge.
Be kind to us, do our children good.

We have Your secret, how You are set in the heart
Of the unapproachable sea, a core that clouds
Rise around, the Infinite's shaft, Heaven's fire;
It's to You, Issue of Power, I bow.

Atharva Veda, I.13

GIFT FOR THE DISJOINTED

Cut off, my spirit cut,
My eye and ear cut, the breath that I suck in,
That circles inside, and that leaves me, cut,
Cut off, my self cut off.
By command of He Who commands
I take this gift, I take you.

Atharva Veda, V.16

COURAGE

As the sky even, and even the earth
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

As the day even, and even the night
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

As the sun even, and even the moon
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

As spirit even, and even action
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

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As the truth even, and even chaos
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

As the past even, and even the future
Do not falter and are not afraid,
So, my life's breath, have no fear.

Atharva Veda, I.15

THE GREAT POWER CONCEALED

People, this hymn will sing of Power
Not found on earth or in heaven,
And yet, by this very Power
All the leaves are given their breath.

His place is final; spent force
There finds its rest and recovers.
Whatever there is, He sustains. The wisest
May grasp Him, or not. Who knows?

Earth is His doing, and heaven,
And the spaces therein, but He,
Like the ripples that soften the face
Of an infinite sea, is gentle.

We know He enfolds with a force—
Not like Him—to hide what shows, to show
What hides. We bow to that Power, One
With bright heaven, with earth, wide and wise.

Atharva Veda, I.32

THE THEN, THE NOW, THE YET-TO-BE

The immensity of living

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Contains the sun, the moon, the maker who sends the true
man exaltation,
And contains death also.
This is to salute you, the very life, containing the then,
the now, the yet-to-be,
You who drive forward, back, below, and over, rolling,
eight wheels and a thousand spokes in one rim.
You made this all with only half; where and how far the
other half spills over now, who knows?

Atharva Veda, XI.4

KAMA'S ARROW

May He Who excites, excite you; do not be stiff in your bed!
I drive the shaft in your heart, the merciless arrow of Kama!

It has wings, is barbed with desire, and its head is the
flint of my will.
May Kama, aiming to kill, sink into your heart!

What parches the spleen, that arrow of Kama,
killingly aimed,
Whose wings lunge it on, that burner up,
I drive at your heart!

Wounded, craving, hot, dry mouth, run to me now.
Soft, unshamable, wholly mine, pleading, devout.

I use this goad to drive you apart from your mother
and father.
As I am relentless, so you shall come to me, doing my will.

O Mitra Varuna, drive all concerns from her heart,
from her head :
Put her, all pliant, into my hands, alone, my will!

Atharva Veda, III.25

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TO EARTH, THE MOTHER

May that Earth, which holds on Her ample lap the ocean,
The rivers, the lakes; which bears the crop-yielding soil,
And is ground for all that breathes and stirs and lives,
May She also bear the fruits of what we have done.

That Earth was born from vast waters, at first was water.
And ancients attended Her growth with their own creations.
Her heart is set on the real, high in the heavens,
And what is undying of Hers is guarded by Truth.

Whatever there is at the core of Your being, whatever
There is in Your air, whatever the power that leaps
From Your length, set us, Mother, among that wealth.
Raise us up. You are my Mother. I am Your child.

Mother, give me that fragrance You Yourself make,
The perfume that comes from green growing things,
from waters,
The same that heavenly players and dancers desire.
Annoint me with it, so none may wish me hurt.

Your very same fragrance that fills up the lotus pool,
The perfume You had as gift at the marriage arranged
For Dawn by the Gods, the very first perfume of all:
Annoint me with it, so none may wish me hurt.

You who uphold the men who, though mortal,
Are singing and dancing together in exultation,
And uphold the men who, mortal, go out to kill
With furious shouts and the wail of trumpets ar war:
O may You, Mother, drive my opponents away,
And make me a man without a rival in all the world.

You Who nurture the five kinds of crops
And are cause for their grains to swell out to ripeness.
O Earth, Wife to the lavish cloud,
It's to You, To Your open hand, that I bow.

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Though men cry out in many strange tongues, and profess
A flurry of faiths, You take them all to Yourself.
Give us a thousand streams of Your wealth,
Give, like a cow whose udder is full.

Make us the masters of crowded highways
And of narrower paths, that few, in a hurry, take,
The ways of goodness as well as the ways of evil.
May these be cleared of those who would hurt us or rob us.
And may we receive what is good to receive.

Birds must come swinging round You when they take flight:
The hawk, the swan, and everything that flies,
And the wind that, circling the sky, goes plunging ahead
To drive down the rain, rock the trees, and flare up the fire.
You are the One who issues the wind its force.

Darkness and golden light, the night and day
Were conceived out of You together, O Earth,
Wrapped in the circling seasons, wound in time.
Render us good in all our scattered homes.

Atharva Veda, XII.1

COMPOSITION

Near me. Not to be done with.
Very near, if never seen.
Look at the composition of the Lord—
No death in it, no wasted word!

Atharva Veda, X.8

PRAYER FOR A GOOD DESTINY

Let that which leads me here lead me gently to oldness
And oldness give me gently over to death,
And that give me gently over to the only Ripeness.

Atharva Veda, XII.3

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TO PLACATE THE MIND

May that mind which, though I wake or sleep,
Ranges as light the blind reaches of space,
May that leaping light in light be good,
May it, wherever it goes, mean well.

That mind, moving in deep and meaning men
At sacrifice or thought, that unseen center,
Being sheathed in being, may it be good,
May it, wherever it goes, mean well.

It knows and it endures, that mind, that flare
Flaring the middle dark inside all things,
That thrust in things forward, may it be good,
May it, wherever it goes, mean well.

It puts the then, the now, the yet-to-be
In place and sends the seven holy men,
Shining, to sacrifice, and may it be good,
May it, wherever it goes, mean well.

Yajur Veda, XXIV

ISAVASYA UPANISHAD

It is all His here, God's world,
All the changings of its changing.
Let it go, and then experience it.
Don't covet another's own.

He moves, Himself unmoving, quicker than thought.
Outrunning thought, He is beyond the reach of the senses.
He outruns by standing still all runners,
And houses the power that storms the sea.

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He moves. He doesn't move.
He's far off. He's very near.
He's in the center of all things,
And also outside of all things.

If it's seen that all things
Are only of the self
And the self is only of all things,
It is also seen that nothing must be despised.

Where all things seen are seen
As one with the seer
The seer of this one
Is neither fooled nor afflicted.

He is everywhere, bright, without tension,
Invulnerable, mysteriously made pure, beyond evil,
Composing, wise, the highest, self-created
He has given everything its self forever.

Those Followers of mere worship
Walk in a blinding dark.
For those whose end is mere knowing
The dark is even darker.

Something from knowing,
Something else from unknowing—
So we gather from sages
Who have shown us its sense.

Knowing and not knowing—
Whoever has them both has learned,
And with not knowing crosses over death,
With knowing lives forever.

The followers of annihilation
Walk in a blinding dark,
For those who take pleasure in the coming-to-be
The dark is even darker.

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Something from annihilation,
Something else from coming-to-be,
And with annihilation crosses over death,
With coming-to-be lives forever.

The coming-to-be and the annihilation—
Whoever has them both has learned,
And with annihilation crosses over death,
With coming-to-be lives forever.

Yajur Veda, XL

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NACHIKETAS'S THIRD WISH

Nachiketas :
There is this question of man's passing on.
Some swear he *is*, others that he is not.
You are the master. Now, I want to know.
I am allowed three boons. The third is this.

Yama :
This, the oldest Gods have even questioned.
The fact is tenuous, hard to take in.
Ask me another thing, Nachiketas;
Don't insist. Excuse me from this one.

Nachiketas :
And so, even the Gods questioned this.
You say it's tenuous, hard to take in.
There is no other master matching you,
No boon a match for this I want fulfilled.

Yama :
Choose sons, grandsons who'll live a hundred years,
Cattle, elephants, horses, piles of gold,
Take for yourself a spacious spread of land,
Or take as long as you desire to live.

Choose any boon you think a match of this.
Choose yourself riches and a long life, both.
Take, if you will, Nachiketas, the world;
Whatever your heart desires I'll see fulfilled!

Desires most difficult to satisfy,
Ask for their satisfaction, what you will.
Here are lovely girls, with chariots, music,
The like of which men never find on earth,

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Be satisfied with these, my gifts,
But don't, Nachiketas, pry into death.

Nachiketas :
But, Yama, all of these are yesterday;
They use a man until he's worn away.
Life itself is finished just like that.
Keep your chariots, keep your dance and song;

Piles of gold will not appease us men;
We shall have gold, but have to face You still!
Our span stretches till You decide it ends.
The boon I want fulfilled is what I've asked.

Coming near the deathlessness of Gods,
What man, always dying here below,
Knowing, brooding on loveliness and love,
Exults in a life, a little lengthened out?

That question, Yama, that they ask and ask,
The Great Passing-On, answer us that,
This boon that gets into the mystery,
This is the one Nachiketas must have.

Yama :
The good is one, comfort another thing;
Both, through different doors, lock a man in.
He who chooses good becomes the good,
But he who chooses comfort chooses nothing.

But you, Nachiketas, considering things
To desire and lovely things, turn from them all,
And turning, turn from the road that goes through wealth;
Wealth is a weight that's sunk so many men.

Passing their time deep in their unknowing,
Dreaming themselves both diligent and learned,
The foolish ones go blundering round and round,
Blind men hauled by blind men through the dark.

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These, unready, can't see the way across,
For gold has turned their dazzled eyes away.
"This is the only world" and, so believing,
Surrender to me over and over again.

That which many, hearing, haven't yet heard,
Which many, having heard, don't comprehend,
Heightens its master, makes its student subtle,
Sublimes whoever knows it to a wonder.

This knowledge can't be heard in argument,
Though, taught by him who knows, it's simple enough.
Nachiketas, you've set yourself to Truth.
May I achieve another such as you.

What's hard to see, to sound, impervious,
Observed in the heart's cave, older than old,
The thinker, closing in with the Essential,
Sees, and seeing, scorns both joy and grief.

It is the Knowing that is neither born nor dies;
It came from nothing, nothing comes from it,
Without beginning, there forever, old :
This, the body dying, does not die.

If the killer dreams, "I kill," the murdered dreams,
"I'm killed,"
Neither knows. It cannot kill, is never killed.

More small than small, greater far than great,
What is Essential houses in the life.
He who is done with willing, thus untouched,
His senses still, sees that Majesty.

Unmoved, it moves far off; asleep, it is everywhere.
I alone know One who exults and does not exult!

Bodiless by bodied things, endless beside the brief,
Huge and pervasive—the wise, seeing this truth, can't grieve.

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Not through comment, the Essential, not
Through intellect, or listening long to scripture.
Rather, It comes when He who chooses wants It;
Then the Essential shows Itself, himself.

Past the senses are their ends; past ends, awareness;
Then, intelligence; then, the Essential vast.

Past greatness, the unrevealed; the Purusha lies beyond,
Past that is nothing, final edge, the end to reach.

The Essential, set in created things, is not revealed,
But the subtle seer can see it, see what is subtle to see.

Wise minds will master speech, knowledge control the mind,
The truth subdue that knowledge, the Essential's peace
that truth.

Get up, get up; facing the greatest teacher, learn!
The way toward Him, the sages say, is hard,
A razor's edge, honed fine for cutting deep.

Katha Upanishad, I

THE ONE ESSENTIAL

Yama speaks :
As water from the mountains drains down many gulleys,
So one who sees this shadow, then that, runs after them.

Pure water poured in pure becomes all one with it,
So, Gautama, the truth of him who, thinking, knows.

As the one fire, entering into this world,
Becomes the form of what it houses in,
The one Essential, housed in all things born
Also takes that thing's external form.

As the one air, entering into this world,

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Becomes the form of what it houses in,
The one Essential, housed in all things born,
Also takes that Thing's external form.

As the one Sun, the single eye of All,
Is not darkened by flaws in things it sees,
The one Essential, housed in all things born,
And past all grief, is not darkened by grief.

The only Lord, housed in all things born,
He who makes from one a swarm of shapes,
The wise who see Him in themselves, His self,
Their joy is joy that lasts, no other joy.

It is this, the Absolute Joy, they think, and can't be said,
How is it otherwise known, if it shines or it does not shine?

In Him no sun, no moon, not one star,
No lightning, how much less these common fires.
But when He blazes up, then all must show;
Then, everything flares up immense with him.

Katha Upanishad, II

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ESSENCE

"Who is in back of the mind's engagement,
And in back of the taking and giving of breath;
Who is in back of the utterance of men,
And gives the eye and ear their duties?"

"The Hearing of hearing, the Mind of mind,
The Speech of speech, the Breath of breath,
The Seeing of seeing; knowing Him, seekers
Are freed and after brought away deathless."

Not words expressing, but what breathes into the words.
That is the Brahman, not which is worshipped by mind.

Not what the eyes can see, but what opens the eyes:
That is the Brahman, not what is worshipped by eyes.

Not what the ears can hear, but what opens the ears:
That is the Brahman, not what is worshipped by ears.

Not what the breath can inspire, but what inspires the breath:
That is the Brahman, not what is worshipped by breath.

Knowing and not, in some way I know.
He knows who knows: 'I know, yet don't'.

Thinking he knows, he doesn't, who doesn't does.
Unknown to knowing, known to unknown.

Known by signs is known—that way, eternity,
Spirit for the power, knowing for the eternity.

If this is now known, it comes to truth.
If this is unknown, the worst will happen.

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The seekers know it in every life,
Are freed and after brought away deathless.

Kena Upanishad, I-II

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IMAGE REVEALED

Oil in sesame, butter in curd,
Wetness of rivers, fire out of wood,
So He in every soul, brought out
By hunting Him down through truth, through denial.

As the Image, dulled by a layer of dust,
Comes shining out when the surface is cleansed,
The creature, when seeing how real the self,
Comes shining out, and far beyond grief.

Svetasvatara Upanishad , I.15, II.14

A TREE IN FLASHING HEAVEN

Seeing everywhere, facing everywhere,
Reaching everywhere, stopping everywhere,
Having made Earth and Sky, the One
Gives man his grip and birds their flight.

Don't I know Him, the great Purusha,
Beyond darkness, splendid as sun.
To know Him alone is to pass over Death,
No road other than that to the Door.

Beyond this one nothing exists,
And nothing greater and nothing less,
A tree in flashing heaven, rooted.
The whole world filled in by Him.

In this nine-doored fastness, or out, He rides like a
swan—
It is all His, whatever moves or is still.

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No hand, no foot, He holds and is quick,
No eyes, but He sees, no ears but He listens,
Knowing the known, Himself unknown,
He is the first, the Great, the Purusha.

Svetasvatara Upanishad, III

TWO BIRDS

Without beginning, One, in red, white, and black,
Conceives all creatures in Her own form.
Without beginning, one clasps Her and Hers;
Another, the same, rejects that delight.

These two birds, the oldest companions,
The very same tree the shelter for both,
The one delighting his way through the fruit,
The other, unmoved, watching forever.

Svetasvatara Upanishad, IV

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VYASA

THE DESERTER
(Vidula Reproaches Her Son Sanjaya)

And what made you? Surely I did not bear,
Your father beget this impotent thing, this man
Who is powerless to feel, this sucker branch
Found only at the bases of trees it harms.

You, shaking there, get on your feet
And do the job your people sent you for,
Do not cheapen yourself because your arms
Are not enough. Set yourself to serve

Your people. Give this terror up. Hit back,
Coward, get on your feet! Don't lie there whipped
Accepting. See your enemies laugh and hoot.
See your kinsmen groan to see you down

Lying there, your dignity plucked off.
A paltry stream is quickest to overflow,
A mousehole is flooded easily enough.
A man debased welcomes indifferent things.

Better to perish in the field
Wrenching out the fangs of enemies
Suppose you put yourself where they can strike
Go out again and let them see your valor.

Why don't you strike their softness, like a hawk
Diving in full force? You should calculate
When to thunder, when to glide in silent
When to hang, waiting, in the sky.

Why do you lie there like a stricken spirit,

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As if a bolt of lightning had knocked you flat?
Coward, get up! Don't lie there whipped, accepting.

Don't sink down, a spectacle for pity.
Action alone will make your name a name
Not to be dismissed, unnecessary.
Don't sink. Rise in the fullness of your force.

Blaze like the *Tendu* tree, when it explodes
With fire; if only for a moment blaze.
Don't merely smoke like a heap of husks
Smouldering as if they clung to life.
The brave man must choose the briefest flaring up
To lingering on and on as so much smoke.

Of course, a coward can spring of royal blood,
Soft inside, his surface a hard shine.
No one is released from human ties
Or finds no reasons to reproach himself
Until he does his work, bravely and well
A walker on the noble way of duty.

Men who consider do not give a hang
Whether they win or lose by what they do.
They work on, doing what they must
Never dreaming their lives a purse to guard.

Pull your powers together, and then strike.
The immortals wait you, even if you fail.
To know exactly what to do in life
What other reason can danger give to living?

Impotent thing, all your offerings,
Good works, your noble name, all wiped away,
Even the ground for earthly pleasure gone—
What reason can you give for living?

Even a fallen soldier, as he falls,
Can bring the enemy down—striking the thighs;

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Despair is inadmissable even
If earth should suddenly sink below.
Like a great bull, he should haul the axle out,
Remembering the value of his blood.

Be brave, proud , remember who you are,
Lift up your family when you lift yourself,
This family which falls with your fall.

That fighting man whose warlike actions people,
Marvelling, do not pass from mouth to mouth
Is merely another grain on the great heap,
No woman even, not to mention man.

That man who is not famous for his gifts,
His self-denying acts, his bravery,
Excellence of mind, or his rich possessions,
Only can be his mother's excrement.

This makes a man, and nothing else—those acts
Which gather glory in, whether they're done
By knowledge or an icy discipline,
Or arms splendidly bearing out their valor.

You have no business with a life of fear,
This seeming peace which is a beggar's skulk,
Killing to yourself, insulting to the Gods,
Wholly miserable and cowardly.

The enemy embraces such a man,
Humiliated, scorned by everyone,
Lacking even power to bring in food,
In clothes, both for himself and for his people.

Glory is wounded by indifference;
Pity wounds it too, inaction too,
And fear. The man without potent desire
Will never taste the highest living taste.

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Pull yourself up and out of evil, take
New heart from iron. Find who you are again.

The people of a brave and forceful king,
Following the lion's courageous trail,
Find delight in heaven, though their kind
Suffers a run of evil luck in war.

Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva, 131

SO IT IS WITH OUR BODIES

Some pots of clay will fall apart just
As they're set to spin for shaping on the wheel,
And some as the wheel is spinning them a shape,
And some when shaped, and some set out to dry,
And some being put to dry, and some well baked.

So is with our bodies which can crumble
In the womb, at birth, inside a day,
A year, two years, while young, full grown, or old.
All creatures come to being or fail to come
According to fore-done acts, both good and bad.
This being so, grief is another waste.

Just as a facile swimmer plays in water,
Dives, then breaks the surface, so a sage
Can toy in this deep and tidal dark of being
Whose currents shoot the fool straight to his doom.

Two chips drifting from lives apart may touch—
To separate: The brotherhood of men.

Mahabharata, Stri Parva, 3

AGAINST GRIEVING
(Vidura Consoles Dhritarashtra)

All savings add to loss, all flights to falls,

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All meetings to divorces, lives to deaths.

In peace men die; the soldier lives in death.
No one can cross the sweeping line death draws.

Men blossom out of nothing, then sink back.
The order, once for all, is set. Why wail?

You get no closer to your dear one or
To death by crying. Things never change for tears.

Death includes it all, all castes, all kinds;
He is no man's enemy and no man's friend.

Wind can flatten grass from any side
Death can flatten everything at will.

All living things are heading to one end.
If one get there ahead, is this a grief?

Death is the cook. He wipes out all those born.
He watches over sleep. No one gets by him.

Youth, beauty, force, riches, health and friends
For what will perish sages have no love.

This is not yours alone. All men partake
In suffering that comes as it must come.

What a man did will sleep with him, and rise
With him and chase him when he runs ahead.

Mahabharata, Stri Parva, 2

THE TEST

The Yaksha asks :

What lifts the sun, what flashes on his flanks,
What brings him down, what has him in its hands?

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Yudhishthira replies :

Prayer lifts the sun, hallowed light goes with him,
Order sets him, and Truth has him in hand.

—What is the best of advents, best that scatters,
Best of what endures, of what springs forth?

Advent of the year is best, and seeds,
The best, and cattle best, and, best, a son.

—What is more weighty than earth, higher than heaven,
Quicker than wind, and wider-spread than grass?

The mother is more weighty, a father higher,
The mind more quick, and worry more wide-spread.

—What is man's spirit, and who is the friend God sent?
What keeps him going and holds him into place?

A son is spirit, wife the friend God sent,
Clouds keep him going, offerings hold him in place.

—What is best to get, and best to own,
And best to keep, and happiest to have?

Accomplishment to get, knowledge to own,
Health to keep, contentment happiest.

—Duty, gain, desire—these contradict.
When can they come together as a whole?

When wife and duty move in accord, as one,
Then contradictions flow together, one.

—Who rejoices? What is the great wonder?
What way is right? What news is most urgent news?

He rejoices who, at home, can stay,
Debtless, even with greens his only meal.

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Great wonder: men go down to death each hour,
But those they leave behind plan to stay on.

Polemics sputter out, texts won't agree,
The sages haggle. Perhaps in some deep cave
The truth is hidden. The trail is hard to find.

The urgent news? Death is the cook—His pot
This blackened world; His kindling day and night;

His fire, the sun; the seasons are his spoon—
And beats us all into the blind stew.

Mahabharata, Vana Parva, 31

VYASA

ILLUSION

Just as the painter can make a flat surface seem high or low,
Clever people can make what isn't so seem so.

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VALMIKI

CITY IN MOURNING

Ayodhya, great city, seems
Like the night itself, in the pitch of dark
Where only cats are awake and owls,
Where men and monkeys keep to cover.

It looks like a river drying up
So that its shallows heat too soon
And waterfowl must surface, fish
And crocodiles restlessly stir.

It looks like a ruined army, warriors
Fallen everywhere, armour
Broken, elephants fallen, horses
And chariots fallen, banners thrown down.

It looks like the tide at ebb, brushed back
By a calm breeze, utterly quiet,
After its hour of foam and roar,
After its highest lifting wave.

It looks like an altar given up
After the Soma has been pressed,
The sacrificial implements
Left here and there, the priests all gone.

It looks like a cow come into heat
But lacking the service of a bull
And standing, desolate, in the pen,
Refusing the offered new-cut grass.

It looks like a necklace with the stones
That made it precious all removed,

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Stones whose lustre glittered out,
Perfectly round, the rarest kind.

It looks like earth shot from its base,
All of its goodness being spent,
Or a star plunged out of heaven,
All its radiance dimmed out.

It looks like a creeper shrivelled up,
Blackened by forest fire, a creeper
That in late spring, a mass of flowers,
Had addled all the hovering bees.

It looks like a densely clouded sky,
Cutting off the moon and stars.
The market place and shops are all
Shut up, the townsmen deep in gloom.

It looks like a drunken party, all
The drinkers departed, having left
Behind their refuse, a carpeting
Of broken cups, voided of wine.

It looks like the fallen bow of a warrior
Dropped off his shoulders when an arrow
Split it, a long and hefty bow
Whose helpless string is broken now.

It looks like a young mare, unsaddled,
Standing forlorn and riderless;
Its rider was a daring man
And will not mount the saddle now.

It looks like the sun when its great light
Is buried under blue-black clouds
And hidden there for many days
During the time of endless rain.

Ramayana, II. 106

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WINTER

Hands and feet stiffen with frost,
Small green glades garland the earth,
A drink of water aches in the mouth.
Fire is beautiful to watch.

When in winter, the sun turns South
And begins to court that deadly quarter,
The North, like a girl deprived of her *Tika,*
No longer glitters with her delight.

Then the days are marvelous to move through;
Noon on the skin is very warm,
The sun seems splendid. But a look
At shade or water dulls a man.

Because of a soft sun, a mist
That hovers, chill, and winds that cut,
The days are dimming down to gloom.
The trees naked, flayed by frost.

No one dozes to sleep outside.
Since the moon, at full, conjoined with *Pushya,*
Night is a hazy gleam of frost,
A slow and icy dragging on.

Now that the moon has given the sun
Its sheen and moves through a dimming mist,
It seems as if a heavy sigh
Had suddenly blinded a mirror's face.

Even the moon at full is dingy
Darkened over by mist. It looks
Like a furrow parched by sun. You can only
Feel its lines. It will not shine.

Its natural touch is cold enough,
And frost sharpens its cutting edge,

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This western wind that, speeding up,
Can make itself more deadly yet.

The forests, swamped with mist and fringed
With fields of wheat and barley, gleam
As the sun rises and herons cry
And cranes, cheering the day's arrival.

The paddy is so rich with grain
Clustered like golden date-palm flowers,
It leans a little with their weight,
A field of weighty yellow light.

Rays trickling weakly down,
Buried in the cold and mist,
The sun, as though today it rose
From farther off, looks like the moon.

The morning sun hasn't attained
Its power; at noon its warmth is good
To feel, its hue the hue of cream,
Its presence cordial on the ground.

The country of the forest, just
As early sunlight slants across,
Touches those who see it, see
Its grasses lightly wet with dew.

The trees themselves, their flowers gone,
Seem to be sleeping now, lapped
In a shine of dew and swapped again
In the milky glimmer of the mist.

Its surface shadowed under haze,
Branches locked in the damp frost,
The river is lovely. Cranes in it
Are only known by crying out.

Even the water drop that hangs

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From the leaf tip, is perfumed,
Having been born of frost, and born
Of gentle sun, and now so chill.

The lotus clusters, ruined by frost,
Are a bare thrust of black stalks
Whose leaves are shrivelled into age,
Whose saffron filament is crushed.

The ox, his eyes shut from fear
Of the bladed paddy ears, drinks
From the water standing in the field
Water warmed by his warm breath.

The wild elephant delights
To touch that chill and crystal water;
But, when he dips his trunk to drink,
He suddenly pulls it again.

Even these waterfowls, afloat
On the water's surface, at their ease,
Hesitate to dive below,
Like young men in their first war.

Ramayana, III, 16

THE SEASON OF RAIN

Nine months through the rays of the sun
The sky had held the rain in its womb
It drinks up the waters of the seas
And waters are born from it, transformed.

Just now it seems quite reasonable
To drape the sun in flower chains,
Climbing to Heaven on the steps
Of lacquered clouds, scaled to the sun.

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The sky seems bruised, its bandages—
Tufts of soft and fleecy clouds,
Moving from the ruddy dusk,
Coppery, silver just at their edge.

The sky seems lovesick, very pale,
With ashen clouds, his sighs the breezes,
The twilight glimmer like a stroke
Of sandal painted on his brow.

The wind, sprung from the womb of clouds,
Cool and good as lotus petals,
Scented with *Ketaka,* cupped
In your hands, can now be drunk.

The mountains, wrapped in cloudy deerskin,
Bearing the sacred thread of streams,
Their mastered breath the wind in caves,
Seem like sages at their thought.

Heaven is being flogged by whips
Of long gold lightning, and growls
Through the low bellowing of the clouds,
A wounded thing in agony.

The lightning that flashes the cloud's
Dark lap suddenly seems
To be my own miserable Sita
Struggling in Ravana's lap.

These horizons, dear to all
Who love, are buried now,
Smeared by a thickened paste of clouds,
The planets and the moon snuffed out.

Look at these *Kutaja* flowers
That blossom on the slopes of hills,
Some of them dimmed in smoky scud,
And shaking in their wish for rain.

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These blossoms seem to quiet
The desire I suffer with more desire.

The dust has fallen, the wind is cooling down,
The worst of summer done, the royal armies
Set to march, must wait at ease, and those
Far off begin their long processional home.

The herons with their mates are heading toward
Himalayan perches thrilling at their flight;
On muddy roads, oxcarts slide and sink,
Laboring in the drench of endless rain.

The sky, spread out with clouds, appears as one
Immense and quiet body of water, here,
Open and light, there dark, and there,
Suddenly blocked by clouds piled up like peaks.

Their waters mingled with the muddy ochre
Of the hills, mingled with the bloom
Of teak and of *Kadamba,* streams flash down
And peacocks echo them with liquid cries.

The clouds bellow them with their thunder
everywhere,
Like great elephants shouldering through the front
Of battle, lightning for their oriflamme
And garlanded with strung-out flights of geese.
Their great bulks cresting like mountain tops.

That flock of geese, circling overhead,
Flies as if lashed ahead by lust for clouds;
It seems a wreath of snowy lotus meant
For heaven, trembling at those windy heights.

The forest glitters as the peacocks dance,
Kadamba trees lift up their gift of gold,
Bulls are swollen taut with their desire.
And the earth spreads out its shining crop of green.

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Rivers tumble, clouds spill down their rain,
Young elephants, untamed, blare out,
The forest country flashes, peacocks dance,
And monkeys, frantic for some shelter, gasp.

The sullen bees must leave, untasted, flowers
Suddenly richer by another taste
For the rain is beating them, and beating, beating
As they hover in the *Kadamba* branch.

The elephant was tracking toward his lair
Deep in the woody hills, when thunder spoke;
He swung around, imagining a rival
Come to challenge in his drunken power.

The birds, their colors wholly rinsed by rain,
Gulp the water Lordly Indra gave,
Water gathered in the cupping leaves,
Water hued like pearl and dropped from heaven.

Dark clouds roiling in dark clouds,
Heavy with new water, look like mountains,
Hugely straining to stay erect, their sides
Darkened by the ash of forest fires.

Ramayana, IV. 18

VALMIKI

EVENING THOUGHT

The evening flushes, the day leans toward her.
But fate is odd. They never meet.

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IN KRISHNA'S ABSENCE: LAMENT OF THE GOPIS

Why all this crying the feverish night, Kurari,
When the Lord, asleep, has withdrawn Himself to Himself?
Could it be, like us, you've also been hurt by those
lotus blue eyes
Whose lightest play can cut to the heart?

And you, Ocean, in one continuous bellow,
Twisting and heaving, what has kept you awake?
Has love for Mukunda also reduced you to this:
Taken from you your calm, your great composure?

And you, Moon, sick with a deadly wasting,
No longer can fend the darkness off with your dimness.
You too, perhaps, like us, think of Mukunda's voice,
And, forgetting who you are, go helplessly dumb.

You, Cloud, who live in Krishna's grace as a friend.
You, like us, all love, are brooding over Him.
Your heart, intense like ours, grows big remembering.
Remembrances come raining down, like tears pouring out.

Unmoving, speechless, immense Mountain,
What is the secret you dwell on in silence?
Could it be that you, like us, want the feel
Of Krishna's feet warming your breast?

O Rivers, your deepest channels running out,
Your wealth of lotus shrivelled and swept away,
Are you sinking down, like us, for lack
Of the loving look that sweeps from Krishna's eyes?

O Swan, His messenger, welcome, welcome; but first,
Drink this milk, then your news. Is He well? Did he

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send any word?
Does He, that waverer, think about us? (Though why
should we care?)
But calm us. News about Him is our need and that
need is eternal.

Bhagavata Purana, X. 90

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KALIDASA

BIRTH OF PARVATI

Menaka, giving birth to her gleaming girl,
Blazed like a sudden seam of precious stones
That had burst apart with the very first quake of thunder,
Spilling its opulent mine of dazzle and flash.

Himalaya shone with the flare of his daughter's birth,
As a lamp is made light the instant its wick is fired,
As stars lead through an immaculate way to heaven,
As consummate words clarify him who thinks them.

Walk round her—beautiful here and here and here,
As if a master disclosed those contours, or sun
Had conceived the lotus with delicate loving light,
A girl become full, the lovely advent of woman.

When she walked, her feet revealed the lustre
Of her nails—the ripest hue of red;
So that each step she took, it seemed a lotus
Sprang, completely petalled, out of the ground.

Whatever God had selected for her form
Went to the rounding out of thighs so turned
They were not thick or thin, but right. To shape
The rest of her was anguish, even for God.

Over the knot of her skirt, a delicate line
Of hair was stroked to the brim of her spacious navel,
As if a sapphire fixed in her girdle's center,
Aimed its blue and priceless beam at that.

Kumara Sambhava, I

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THE YOUNG PARVATI

Altars are slender at their waists,
Like her; and the three soft folds of her middle—
An offering to the God of Love,
Three gentle steps for His intimate use.

Her breasts at their full—a crush of white
Against white, so weighty, the slenderest strand
Of the lotus could find no room to rest
In the straits between darkening nipple and nipple.

I think her arms must have been more delicate
Than *Sirishas;* if so, the God of Love could still,
Though crumpled by Siva's fire, lock Him up,
A docile inmate of those delicate arms.

Her necklace of pearls, flowing around her neck,
Dips toward her breasts; it is in love with her skin,
And her skin responds—an inseparable pair; as two
words,
When one sets the other off, fuse into one.

You can set on the fieriest leaf some flower
Of ivory, on coral's vividest red,
A pearl—mere copies of her smile:
Its white of white, its kindled copper.

When she, speaking her perfect tongue, let drop
The sound that sweetness makes as words,
Even the cuckoo's music, set by hers,
Made listeners wince as any untuned lute.

The glance of her long eyes swings with the motion
Of the blue lotus moved by the rising of wind.
Did she gather that flowing glance from the doe
Or was it the doe that learned at her look?

Kumara Sambhava, I

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ADVENT OF SPRING

The heat of the woods suddenly burst into buds
In their fiery millions, squadrons that took for their colors
Red of the morning sun. It looked as if Spring,
In this heat, had wounded the goddess of trees with His
nails.

This was the brightness of Spring Whose eyes were adorned
With dark lines of swarming bees, and wore for a mark
On His brow the orangest of flowers; Whose lips were smeared
With the juice of the Mango's new leaves, red upon red.

He has eaten the mango shoots and His call is become
The music of honey, this cuckoo, honey that soothes
The fury of girls with their lovers, music that moves
So deep that surely the Love God sings through such sounds.

When the God of Love rose on the scene with His mate,
His flowered miraculous bow ready for hunting,
All pairs of the world, whether they moved or were still,
Turned, with an urgent and craving thrust, to each other.

The bee took honey first for his love, only then
For himself from the flower; the delicate Musk deer
Stroked his mate with his soothing horns and, she,
Eased by their touch, softened and closed her eyes.

Delicate, gentle, the motion—an elephant lifting
Her trunk to her mate with a gift of water steeped
In the pollen of lotus; gracious the heron's beak
As he proffered his mate the tender stalk of that flower.

Even the trees were loving; leaning down,
They gathered in the vines with their limbs; and the vines,
Their flowers clustered like breasts, their trembling shoots
As red as lips, reached up and clung to these lovers.

Kumara Sambhava, III

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PARVATI'S BEAUTY

Spring has given her jewels—*Ashoka* whose red
Has taken the heart out of ruby, *Karnikara.*
Essential gold drawn from pure gold alone.
Sindhuvara, more white than pearl is white.

A little slower because of the full of her breasts,
Her garment the hue of sunrise, she's much like a vine,
Swaying as it might sway, a little bent down
By the comely weight of blossoms bunched in its leaves.

That girdle of saffron blossoms needs tying again,
How can she stop it from sliding with hips so smooth
And round. It isn't a girdle at all; the Love God
Has left her an extra string of His bow, just in case.

The bees found her mouth like the *Vimba,* a red
More sweet for her breathing across it; and, fearful,
She drove them time and again from her face
By a flick of the lotus she playfully held.

Kumara Sambhava, III

SIVA IN MEDITATION

Figure of meditation, Siva fixed,
His body set, His legs, His shoulders set,
And on His lap, His open upward palms
One on the other set, a lotus in flower.

The wild mat of His hair was bound up by snakes,
The rosaries hung at His ears were double stranded,
He had knotted around Himself a deer-hide more dark
Than that dark and venomous line circling His neck.

The lashes still, the eyebrows motionless—
No flick or flutter; concentrate and fixed,

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The gaze converged just at the tip of the nose.
The pupils lit with tense and steady fire.

Controlling His breath at its deepest going, He sat
Like a cloud containing a nearly intolerable flood,
A sea become still with the stillness of terrible calm,
A lamp in an airtight room, its flame unshaken.

Out of his forehead, the softest stream of light,
More yielding even than light from the crescent moon,
Itself so supple. Aglow, it was more soft
Than a single silky thread from the stalk of a lotus.

He had gathered into Himself His thoughts, had pulled
Them back from the nine-gated body, and, setting them down
On the floor of awareness inside, could show Himself
To Himself, that spirit the yogis have called undying.

Kumara Sambhava, III

RATI'S LAMENT FOR KAMA

Never unkind to me, my Lord,
And I not once, not once, displeasing to you—
What does this absence mean my Lord,
My loving Lord? Your Rati wants to know.

O what a lie to soothe me with
When you would sing: "Your life is in my heart,"
Mere politeness, or how should you be ashes
And I standing here wholly untouched?

My dear, who will now lead those girls
Poised and readied by the cloudy thunder,
Lead them to where their lovers wait,
Lead them lapped in the monsoon's heavy night?

In your absence the very wine glass

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Is a mocking mouth to women who, so ready,
Roll their reddened eyes from it
And utter confusion in the simplest word.

They wanted you, those indifferent Gods,
While you were reddening my feet with lac;
My right foot you had just completed;
My left—when will you come to finish that?

Madhu, here is your friend, dead ashes,
Leavings as gray as doves, and nothing more,
And even these frittered away,
Fleck after fleck, by a stupid heartless wind.

Your friend would not rise up again;
As a light, stunned by the wind, goes blackly out.
And I—look at me now—a wick
Smoking in a dead and darkened lamp.

Kumara Sambhava, IV

PARVATI'S PENANCE

Her right hand drops, for Her lips no more desire
Its attentions, nor Her breasts the sandal paste. Those
fingers
Now gather the holy *Kusha,* that wounding grass,
And only the sacred beads compel Her right hand.

So soft She was that once the flowers that fell
From Her hair as it loosened in sleep could hurt Her, and here
She finds comfort enough on the ground, the grossest ground,
With only Her arm crooked under Her head for a pillow.

So fragile was She the toss of a ball took Her breath,
Who now has joined the hard and holy denial
Of sages. Surely, She's made of lotus and gold
Softly giving as flowers, as metal, firm.

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Rain was Her food, only what heaven, unasked,
Would give of the Moon, whose light was sweetened by dew.
And now She is quite at one with woods, taking,
Like trees, simply what God sends down, no more.

Fire of the summer sun, fire of the blaze
She had built to cleanse Her—a creature of fire and kin
To the smouldering earth; when rains flashed down, hot mist
Rose from them both, Her burnished skin and the earth's.

Stone was Her bed, and the leaky dark Her roof.
That season the floor of heaven dissolves and rain
Is a chilling companion; the vigilant night could see
By its vision of lightning just what Her penance was.

Winter night, loud wind, frost spreading,
And She sits in that water, nearly ice,
And being there, consoles the very plovers
Crying out to their mates, far off, the cold.

Night loomed in and frost closed over the lake
Like a death. But She endured, the single lotus
In all that wintry water, Her mouth the petals,
Her breath the fragrance, Her presence the saving one.

Kumara Sambhava, V

THE BRIDE

Stepped from her bath, gowned in the whitest silk,
She was ready to be a bride as the land is ready
Just after rain has washed it and, freshened, it bears
A million blossoms of *Kasa* for a raiment of white.

Her lips a little parted, stain on the lower,
Leavings of wine, a smear of red and trembling
To speak of desire, a filling fruit, not quite
In its deepest hue, but splitting with so much sweet.

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Putting her bridal ornaments right, she seemed
A young vine just now coming to blossom, seemed
A young night filling its sky with stars, or a river
Of autumn bearing a rush of migrant birds.

The mirror gave back her white silk dress;
But also gave back the foaming shore
Of the milky sea, an exultant tide;
Gave back the autumn full of the moon.

Kumara Sambhava, VII

NIGHTFALL

Over there, look how the lordly sun, swinging
His great bulk down toward the edge of the west,
    has soundlessly
Sent back his shadow of fluent gold like a bridge
Of long light crossing the darkened width of the water.

Dark in the east, and west the narrowest gleam;
The sky is one lake, the sky is one immense lake,
And it's drying up on that edge to its black mud floor;
But on this one, a thinning line of water still shines.

Such a sky as this, such clouds, such reds,
Such yellows, such yellow-reds, it is as though
The dusk itself composed these billowy lines,
These delicate hues, wanting only our praise.

The sun is generous. Before it falls it spends
A wealth of light, some on Himalayan lions
Flaring their manes, some on the trees whose leaves
Flash out, some on the mineral gleam of low crests.

See how the darkness, Parvati, leans in one bulk
On the fiery last of twilight; it is as if
A bank of palms had lifted its heavy shadow
To lean on the ochre shine of a little stream.

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Now there is nothing to see above, below;
Look back, nothing; look ahead, the very same nothing;
Nothing to the left, nothing to the right; the world
Lies steeped in the tidal dark like the womb of the night.

Kumara Sambhava, VIII

MOONRISE

The Mountain, shadowing out its dark, is attending
The Moon and the stars. The Mountain is thus my mimic,
For I have stood darkly behind your pretty companions
And listened to you expound your latest delight.

See that delicate pink overhead, like the fruit
Of the *Sindhuvara;* it doubles itself on the lake.
Surely the Moon all alone is showing how plovers
Are parted, though mates, by the daily fall of the sun.

The first soft lights of the lifting Moon. You can feel
How tender and new, as they draw out your hand to take,
As shoots of barley draw out your hand to take,
With a pinch of your nails, whiteness to wear in your ears.

When the lotus, at nightfall, shut itself in as if eyes
Had shut out of shyness, the darkness was kissed by the Moon.
And kissed hard, but only after he brushed aside,
With a very light touch, the loosened spread of her hair.

Moonlight on their high backs, their lower flanks
Steeped in the dark, the mountains seem like a mass
Of elephants in rut, their looming sides
Adorned with wide stripes of silver-white.

On the wishing-tree, thousands of wishes in silk
As so much like moonlight, moonlight so much like silk,
They are just one thing—silken moonlight of wishes;
Only the wind can show us how wishes tremble.

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The Light of the Moon, fallen down through the leaves,
Is scattered and shed like thousands of wispy flowers
All over the ground. I almost could scoop them up
In my hands for you to put in the dark of your hair.

Look at that star, how it seems to tremble nearing
The Moon; surely, like you, it must be a bride;
Surely that nervous glitter tells how it is
To be coming to love, like you, my glittering bride.

Kumara Sambhava, VIII

AJA'S LAMENT

If even the flowers by merely touching can wipe out a life,
What is there left that Death, once roused, can't
choose for the kill?

Or are His delicate weapons reserved for delicate things?
The lotus slain by the autumn dew suggests so much.

Why won't this murderous garland, held to my heart,
destroy me?
But the God, as He wills, restores with poison, kills with life.

You forgave all, my dear, even the hardest words;
And now why so still, when I have done nothing, my dear?

Or maybe you dreamed I did you some unforgivable wrong
And have left me alone without a word, a single word.

My breath went after her, after her, fluttering out toward
death.
Now let it suffer the grief it has made by coming back.

Shine of our loving still on your face—and the face dead!
To Hell with these things, these things we can touch, and
love, and lose!

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Wake up, dear heart, and calm me, wake as that plant
wakes up
With a blaze and scatters the icy dark of Himalayan caves.

Now night and the moon are one, and the plover is with
her mate.
They can bear their divorces, but mine is endless, a
burning toward death.

You have left these lovely reminders behind to soften the grief,
But how can these be a comfort—symptoms of what
I have lost?

Those girls who moved with your moods are here and that
crescent moon,
Your child. And I as ever. But you—brutally gone.

Endurance gone, and joy, songs done, the season sullen.
A waste of tinsel and triumph. This bed unused forever.

Raghuvamsa, VIII

THE FORSAKEN CITY

My desolate halls, my terraced houses,
Once handsome, masterless now, and wasting;
I seem to mimic the sun at its fall—
A wreckage of light through wind-slashed clouds.

These streets that lived with the anklets' trill
As they flashed toward love, now echo the patter
And yelp of jackals dribbling live ash
From their smoking tongues as they shadow on by.

Playful women, splashing, could sound
My pools like *mridangas*—a mellow thrum.
And now the water bellows and groans
Gored by the untamed buffalo's horns.

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The bower poles snapped, the peacocks sit
In the trees. No dance. The *mridanga* is still.
Their tails, like the tails of their wilder kin,
Mere stubble, charred in the burning woods.

Pretty footprints on every stone,
Crimson of lac wherever they stepped.
Now a different red, printing the paw
Of a tiger gone by, just off the kill.

Cubs of the lion have clawed in their fury
The heads of those elephants painted at play
In a pool. The cows hold delicately out
Those silky lotus stems to their bulls.

The carved women who hold up these pillars
Are weathered into the rocky gray.
Skins that the snakes have left behind them
Glisten like new wraps at their breasts.

The moon no longer drops strings of pearl
On my houses of pleasure. They're patched with
dark;
The plaster, exhausted, has dropped; moss
thickens,
And grass had wedged out of every crack.

My vines, whose limbs were bent gently down
By women, at play, in their need for flowers,
Are torn apart now and snapped by a rage
Of monkeys, like savage alien folk.

Incense no longer drifts through the lattice
Of balcony windows—spiders have woven
Where lamps once lustred intensely the dark
And lovely young faces dawned on the day.

Raghuvamsa, XVI

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DEER HUNT

There! There! That deer lunging away,
Its foreparts stretched ahead, its rear
Drawn in as if to catch its chest;
Its eyes are set as stones, its neck
Is wrenched around—a poignant curve—
Back toward the car that comes on fast.
Its mouth at every gasping breath
Scatters a shower of half-chewed grass
Behind to mark its headlong track.
It moves in long elegant bounds,
And so it leaps more than it runs,
And seems to fly more than it leaps.

Sakuntala, I.7

SPEED

From this breakneck chariot little things grow quickly great,
And what an instant ago seemed a part becomes a
sudden whole,
And what is truly bent seems, while I'm flying by it,
straight;
Nothing looks far, yet what's beside me now leaps
miles behind.

Sakuntala, I.9

YOUNG TREE

Imagine the reddened new-come springs—her lips;
frail and gracious boughs—her arms,
The whole tree swelling into bloom—her
youngness swelling into bloom.

Sakuntala, I.19

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SAKUNTALA WATERING THE PLANTS

Her arms, heavy with lifting pitchers, dangle from her
drooping shoulders,
And each straining breath raises her breast, then,
gasped out, lets it sink.
Fine sweat silvers her face between *Sirishas* hanging at
her ears.
One hand cradles her loose and tumbling hair, feeling
its languid weight.

Sakuntala, I.27

CRY FROM VERY DEEP

Though you're contented now, some lovely thing,
the half-heard sound
Of words in a song can conjure a desire up from nowhere
That your mind can't grasp, because the life before is crying
To the present life what it has loved, but cries from very deep.

Sakuntala, V.2

CITY MAN—WOODS MAN

A greasy man and one just bathed, a filthy skin and
one just washed, a drowsy head and one awake,
Limbs in chains and limbs at liberty; thus, the city
man, tumbled in pleasure, and the woodsman.

Sakuntala, V.11

DESCENT FROM HEAVEN

From here, earth rises, at first, as peaks floating in clouds,
The trees come clear, below their green, as trunks and limbs.

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These glittering little streaks widen to ample rivers.
The world leaps to my side as sudden as a ball kicked up.

Sakuntala, VII.8

MOONRISE

The moon, behind the eastern peak,
Scatters the darkness with its rays.
The horizon there is beautiful, a face
Framed in cloudy swirls of hair.

Vikramorvasiyam, III.6

THE DEMENTED KING

Wind is ruffling the peacock's tail as he scans the
thickening clouds,
His neck arching out, his throat on the aching edge of a cry.

She, gone from the scene, no one now
Can put the peacock's darling plumage down,
Yet what would he do if he saw her hair, full of flowers
And loosened by love, come spreading down her arm?

Not her anklets sounding, but the call of the royal
swans;
Seeing the sky go dark with clouds, they long for
the lake.

Put off your flight to the lake just now, my swan,
Drop that morsel of lotus stalk; it can wait.
Put an end to this pain with news of my love.
Virtue serves a friend before itself.

And yet if you did not see by the edge of your lake
My love, whose eyes so delicately arch,

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How did you come by her walk, its sway
And langour: was it a question of theft?

Give back my love, swan. If you have part
Of the plunder, you must surrender it all.
Bee, I want news of my love whose eyes overwhelm—
But no, you could never never have seen her;
For if you had ever found the bouquet of her breath,
Would the lotus now be able to draw you?

Vikramorvasiyam, IV.8,10,14-17,22

FLOWER

This *Navakandali* blossom, streaked
With red and cupping a drop of dew—
And so I think of her eyes, angry,
Misting over with unspilt tears.

Vikramorvasiyam, IV.5

THE CITY OF THE YAKSHA

That Mountain City—where girls even the gods desire,
Cooled by the river breeze, sheltered from sun
In the shade of *Mandaras* that grow by the water's edge,
Toy with their jewels, hiding them first under fistfuls
Of yellow sand, then hunting them out again;

Where, come night, as intense lovers loosen their bindings
And tear at their silky wraps, shy girls with ready mouths,
Try to put out the flares of jeweled lamps
With handfuls of rouge and powder, but try in vain;

Where, with *Mandara* blossoms torn from flying hair,
With yellow lilies dropped from ears, with strings of pearls,

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With scattered garlands shed from breasts, the morning sun
Lines out the route of women gone to love at night;

Where the wishing-tree wholly serves a woman's needs:
Bright cloth, sweet wine that rolls and arches eyes,
Delicate buds and sprigs to make much of the body's beauty,
Red dye of lac to tint the soles: all of these—

There is my home, in that city, and north of Kubera's
mansion,
Seen far off by its rainbow-colored gateway arch.
Near it, a young *Mandara* that my love attends like
her child
Hangs with flowers, its boughs bent down till hands
can reach them.

Meghaduta, II

THE YAKSHA'S WIFE

Slender, young, with fine teeth, and lips like ripened
Vimba fruit,
Narrow-waisted, eyes like a startled doe, her navel deeply set.
Slow to move because of ample hips, bent slightly by
her heavy breasts—
So she will look—the Lord's best work among women.

Think of her so far away as my second self—
Far away just as the plover's mate is far.
Maybe she's changed, a lotus bud bruised by winter frost,
Because she's spent these endless painful days apart.

Maybe she'll sit, in crumpled clothes, the Vina across her
knees,
Trying to tune, somehow, the strings that are damp with
her tears,
Trying to sing a song she composed herself in my name,
But will keep on somehow forgetting how the tune goes.

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Or maybe you'll see her alone in her bed, wasted with longing,
Turned on her side, like a slip of moon at rest in the lap
Of the eastern sky. The nights she counted as minutes,
loving
With me, must now be forever, weighted with sweltering
tears.

Meghadu ta, II

THE YAKSHA'S MESSAGE

"In the *Syama* creeper your lithe body, in the doe's eye
your look,
In the moon your face, the peacock's feathers your spread
of hair,
In the water rippling, your brows—I see them one by one,
But, O, my passionate girl, nothing that mirrors you whole!

"On a flat rock, with red madder, I draw your face,
Burning with anger, then myself cast down at your feet,
When suddenly my eyes are wet and blurred. By a brutal fate
We aren't allowed to meet again, even in pictures.

"The wind that blows southward from the remote Himalaya,
Heavy with the resinous scent of deodar trees
Whose shoots it's just now opened, I clutch it, hoping
Maybe it's touched your flesh, my marvelous girl :

"As I tease myself with the fantasies I've made.
Dearest, don't you sicken or lose heart either.
Who lives in perfect joy or endless grief?
The wheel, as it must, swings up, swings down."

Meghaduta, II

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ASVAGHOSHA

SUNDARI AND NANDA

If Nanda had not found Sundari, nor she,
Whose brows beautifully arch, found him,
Neither could have been whole and shining,
Like night without moon, moon without night.

Their looks avid for one another,
Their hearts all one thing,
They made love, holding so tight,
They wiped the sandal paste off of their breasts.

He adorned her, not that she needed adorning,
But out of his loving whim.
Adorned with what she already was,
It was she who gave those adornments their beauty.

Handing him her mirror to hold,
She gave him his orders: "Hold it up
While I paint a pattern of flowers on my face."
Feeling lucky to be so honored, he held it up.

Suddenly seeing her husband's beard
She painted its image under her nose.
Nanda, stuck with the mirror, sighed,
Hazing over the silver surface.

Pleased by his little gesture of torment,
Smiling slyly all to herself,
She twisted her brows to make a frown,
Pretending to be annoyed at his bungling.

With her right hand, she languidly twirled

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Her lotus earring on his shoulder,
With the fingers of her left, like a spray of young leaves,
Tickled his face, her eyes half closed.

* * *

While Nanda was joyously playing, high
In his palace which seemed like a home in heaven,
Down in the court Tathagata came with his bowl:
It was his time to ask for alms.

Saundarananda, IV

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MATRCETA

PRAISING BUDDHA

In Him, all-saving, there's no fault or effect of fault,
In Him, all knowing, goodness without beginning or end.

So I, come to that human condition, the great
communion of Law,
As a turtle might stick his neck through a seam
between two immense seas,

What can I do but praise, though my words make no
real sense,
Overwhelmed with change, rifted with the fatal works of
this world ?

So much, of such kind—there is no end to counting,
Your good brings us good. Therefore I count it loudly
as praise.

Is it worth the trouble—or not? Untroubled by these doubts
Out of your own choice you help this helpless world.

You are good by no compulsion, kind without cause,
Friend to strangers, kin to those with no kin.

You are all goodness, not from fear of evil following
On evil, or hope of a better future, but by perfect purpose.

Turning aside from the twisted, holding fast to the straight,
You are the only container of perfect action.

Beside that unsounded deep of what you know,
The sea seems a puddle made by a cow's hoof in the mud.

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Beside the blazing wisdom that banishes ignorant dark,
The sun seems hardly fit to serve as a firefly.

The burnish of the autumn moon, the sky, the sea, seem dulled
Against the candor of Your words, Your thoughts, Your acts.

2

Detached, yet desired; dazzling and yet not blinding.
Withheld, yet full of force; who could hold back from
this beauty?

Your presence delights the eyes of both the same:
Those that have seen a hundred times, those who see first.

The body by its owner's goodness, its owner by the body's:
Both made more rich by each, the highest good attained.

3

All this waking world, all of it, was bound in pain.
You, out of Compassion, bound yourself to free the world.

What shall I praise the most—you or your great Compassion,
Out of which you bound yourself to dissolution,
knowing its evil?

Given its head, your Compassion brought you to this:
From self-delighting solitude into the swarming mass.

As an elephant is drawn from the lake by a spell, you were
drawn by Compassion's call
From the calm of the woods into the traffic of town.

It's this steady Compassion that hacks you in hundreds of
pieces
And casts you all ways like an offering for the good of others
And yet you must want that; it must be the work of your will,
For though it causes you grief, it doesn't disturb you.

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Hardly a fraction of your goodness has yet been sung,
But now my heart fills up with a marvelous content.
Before a lake of wide, sweet waters, even without
His tasting, a man's thirst may find itself refreshed.

Satapancashatka

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BHARAVI

IN PRAISE OF WELL-SHAPED SPEECH

Clear, flawless, sounded for good, and moving—
this utterance,
Like a lucent glass, gives back the unmixed mind.

Phrases leap out, but the heft of meaning brings them back;
Each sentence self-contained, but meaning moves on through.

The logic overwhelming, but drawn from venerable lore:
Only a fool would blunder against such telling speech.

Kiratarjuniyam, II

THE WATER PLAY : GANDHARVAS AND APSARAS

It was a cooling fan, this wind; its slow
And spray-heavy motion sent out the fragrance of lotus
To freshen these girls at their play, and led them on
To water, while playing itself in the ripples of water.

The swaying moves of those girls made swans look stiff,
Their hips out-curved the sandy shore of the river,
The lotus, having no eyes, could not match their faces.
If the river was lovely, they were lovelier still.

The instant the goddesses stepped in the water to wade,
Lifting against the flow their heavy thighs,
Their motion sent out a tumble of waves toward the shore,
Flapping up a startled scatter of cranes.

"Are these a pair of bees at work on a lotus,

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Or are they really the glint of her stirring eyes?
Is this shining mass of dark her heavy hair,
Or a swarm of bees, fulfilled and hanging still?

Is this thin show of white the work of her smile,
Or the lotus budding, its stamens barely seen?"
One, who had crouched among the lotuses, hiding,
Gave her friends a puzzle for working out.

One lover lifted a garland he made and put it
Over his love's full breasts, while her rivals watched,
And she flaunted that gift, though dabbled and crushed by
water.
Love is in offering, not in the thing that's offered.

A glitter of heads, all circled in chaplets, shone out
When the water reached up and plucked those flowers off;
Drifting helpless downstream, they were forlorn
As a royal chamberlain, stripped of power, with no one to rule.

The color washed from their cheeks, the lac from their lips,
Collyrium gone, and still they shone, most lovely,
And seeing them shine, their lovers lucidly knew
That beauty lent the gauds it wore all their beauty.

Swaying lotus matched with glowing face,
Shifting line of foam with swinging necklace,
Bright water with the skin this water rinsed—
The waves strove with their beauty, strove and lost.

Their half-closed eyes send out a long look
To lovers, who hold them trembling, very close;
Their breasts lift in the water; they're breathing deep—
From weariness, or a high tide of desire?

The water, broken by the slow advance
Of breasts, of hips, of thighs, like stately prows
Scampered ahead, in ripples, to the shore—
Crying that the play of goddesses is done.

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Its blue stained by sandalwood washed off
And spreading; its surface streaked with tangled garlands,
Its sinking waves a rumpled sheet—with the women gone
The river seemed a beautifully tousled marriage bed.

Kiratarjuniyam, VIII

IN PRAISE OF GOOD WORDS

Lucid, cleanly uttered, and good to hear,
Winning even a mind that came to attack;
Straight, fluent, but also grave with sense,
A speech issuing from act on scrupulous act.

There are those, it's true, so facile and well-schooled
Their talk exactly proclaims their adequate minds;
And then a few, a masterly few, whose words
Flash, of a sudden, down through the dark of sense.

Some find powerful plainness is best, and some
Allusion, finely worked until it's exact;
Different stations, different tastes. Most coveted
And rare the speech that lifts all men to its praise.

Kiratarjuniyam, XIV

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MAGHA

CAROUSAL

Beautifully adorned and richly scented
Shining with restless lotus eyes, the faces
Of these cherished girls had such round lips,
Their lovers used red mouths as cups for wine.

Netting down shyness with their warm attentions,
Rousing by their desires the girls' desires,
The young men made them forget all shame and drink
Their very love, deeply disguised as wine.

A mirror for the lover's lovely face,
And perfumed with freshly gathered mango-buds,
And sweet, and hummed over by bees, and cool,
The wine left all the senses satisfied.

The drunken bee hovered, confused between
The wide-eyed faces of these girls who breathed out
The sweet bouquet of wine they drank and the cups
They held figured with lotuses carved like life.

The wine, tasted by the lips of women
So lovely, surely acquired a richer taste,
For though their lovers had tasted the same before,
This was new, more sweet, till now untasted.

One lover there, drinking with naked greed
The wine of his woman's lips, turns now and then
To match a sudden sip from his cup, as one
Wanting a foretaste of the richer drink.

The new wine, acting like a lover,

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Aroused even the simplest, newest bride
To flirting laughter, innuendo, glances
Full of art, full of intimate meanings.

The women's anger with their wandering husbands,
Or their practiced unconcern with them—
Did wine merely wash it away or cool it?
Or were those women's hearts dissolved in wine?

Statements left half-finished, garlands, robes
And jewels flung aside indifferently,
Silly gestures, rising to go: these all
Announced how dazed with drink the women were.

That passion the women had for so long a time
So painstakingly hidden from their lovers,
Set loose and given courage by the wine,
Now cried out from their eyes, naked and red.

Loveliness adorned their arms and legs;
Youth at new bloom adorned their loveliness;
The shine of their desire adorned their youth;
Wine and a lover's nearness, their desire.

Sisupalavadha, X

THE MORNING AFTER

Having fought with her lover and turned her back on
his pleading,
She had been shamming sleep. At the cock's high crow,
She turned to her lover and, never opening her eyes.
Was with him again, as if were done in sleep.

Some, waking beside their lovers, who still
Slept peacefully as after the long work of love,
Kept very still, held in a tight embrace,
Fearing to waken their partners and cut off delight.

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The bride of the East, at last and with ease, discards
The veil of moonlight she held so close for so long—
A gauze of shyness that, finally let slip, discloses
A face that glows with the wine of the morning sun.

Having watched all night with wide-eyed attention the marvel
Of the always-novel play of loving pairs.
The flame of the lamp now wavers, flutters, and dulls
Like an eye that, open too long, is glazing with sleep.

Night, like a woman done with a secret tryst,
Hurries away, her raiment the dappled sky
Crumpled with the moon's long work, the breeze
Of dawn made aromatic by their loving.

The directions haul up the sun from the sea like women
Hauling a bulky pitcher out of a well.
The rays are laid like a spread of ropes being lowered,
The chatter of birds like women's noisy gossip.

The golden wine cup earlier drained by the girls
In their revels now seems to be—
Tinted by the new red rays of the dawn,
Filled to the top again, brimming with wine.

Though falling outside in the valleys, the blazing rays
Of the sun, as they glance off the mountain's flank (an ashen
Silver wall, the hue of fading moonshine,)
Hunt, strike and down the dark to the deepest caves.

Sisupalavadha, XI

DVARAKA

Circled by sea, the four directions
Glowing gold from its golden walls,
The city rose from the waves rejoicing,
Bright as the blaze at the ocean's heart.

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Circled by conchs that tossed in the waves
Of the restless sea, the fortified walls
Of the city seemed like Sumeru's peak
Crowned at night by the wheeling stars.

The sea, stacking wave above wave,
Sweeping in the jewels that traders
Had piled on their wharves, earned once more
Its old name: The Treasury of Gems.

And yet the sea, with waves for hands,
Has carefully set out those jewels,
Still dripping wet, on the city's doorsteps,
As if to dry them in the sun.

The waves come plunging from far off,
Set to subdue the towering walls.
Their power repulsed, they fall away,
Beaten and shamed, and melt to nothing.

A cloud, wanting to see the wonder,
But suddenly checked by battlement,
Roars out in rage, but then begins
To weep, disguising its tears as rain.

At night, the marble stairs and crystal
Terraces of mansions merge
With moonlight, so Dvaraka's women seem
Like Heaven's girls strolling the sky.

Sisupalavadha, III

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BHARTRHARI

CONSOLATIONS

Is it raining today? Then, of course, he can't go out of
the house.
Is it very cold? That's the excuse of
"Beautiful-eyes" for holding him close.
A dewy breeze for the window?
Why, it cools them off after love.
For the lucky, even a rotten day is good, melting them
into love.

Srngarasatakam

WINTER WIND

Tousling their hair, pressing their eyes shut, tugging at their
dress,
Sending shivers through their limbs, making them sway
as they move,
Biting and biting their lips, till they breathe in deep gasps
like sighs,
The winter wind over and over plays lover to lonely women.

Srngarasatakam

THE INCURABLE

Water will ward off fire; an umbrella sun.
A prod the crazed elephant, a stick the bull and ass,
This drug or that a disease, and chanting a poison—
There's a remedy for everything; for a fool, none.

Nitisatakam

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THE DIFFERENCE

Sensation—as it was, alive; action, as it was;
The thinking, as it was; the language, as it was;
Only the money missing and the man, though as he was,
Becomes another man. How curious.

Nitisatakam

FINESSE

Honest and lying; full of wrath and the sweetest speaker;
Savage and gentle; frantic after wealth and liberal;
A great squanderer and a greater hoarder still;
The king's finesse has many faces—like a whore.

Nitisatakam

THE SERVANT'S PROBLEM

If quiet, he's dumb, but if articulate, a loud mouth;
Impudent if near at hand, but shiftless if he keeps his distance.
If patient, he's a mouse; vulgar if he shows a little flare.
The rules for serving are such not even Yogis master it.

Nitisatakam

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE COURT

Untrained in the fine art of whispering into ears,
Unable to follow a master's step and seem happy,
Neglected by those who teach how to lie, though lying
by sweet,
What do I have to offer a king?

Nitisatakam

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PROGNOSIS

Why bother to hold your sobs back, to scrape your tears off,
Sullen, wet-faced woman? O, you'll cry louder yet
When, weary of furious alarms, inflamed by the taunts
of friends,
He backs away; indifferent, bland, and gone.

Satakam, 5

INGENUE

Friends, I did as you said: stiffened, desperately lowered my
willing eyes when his eyes called me,
Stared at his feet, shut my hungry ears on the sweets of
his speech, threw up my hands to hide
The shiver and flush of my skin. But what could I do
if this treacherous blouse,
With a mind of its own, suddenly gave at the seams?

Satakam, 10

JOURNEY OF A HUNDRED DAYS

When he told her it would take a hundred days, she
asked her darling
If he meant the morning would be lost, or would the noon,
Or afternoon, or—God help her! the whole day, and it
rained tears.
Darling, forestalled, ended his journey of a hundred days
at the first stop.

Satakam, 12

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THE UNRELENTING WOMAN

Your voice sweetly brought me in; your smile, more close,
And when I talked, sweet was the deference of your
tilted head;
But your look, at the meeting of eyes, said nothing soft.
What drives
A man wild is the stealth of that scorching wrath,
O heart of rock.

Satakam, 14

FINESSE

When he came in, she rose. No chance to sit together.
She ducked out of his arms to order betel leaf.
As he opened his mouth to speak, she called the maid.
A fine fury,
Slapping him every turn by too much courtesy.

Satakam 18

TRANSITION

Calmly I waited, watching how she'd take my entrance.
That set her off—"Look at the cheat! He will not
even speak."
And then a long and wishful look, despairing, till I laughed
At something slight, and stone dissolved in sudden
solvent tears.

Satakam, 24

THE BETRAYAL

I set my brows for frowning, but my look goes flying to him

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All the faster; I hold my words back, but my face insists
on smiling;
I shut my mind, but then my body shakes as he comes near.
How can I conserve this fury when I see him right
before me?

Satakam, 28

WARNING

Why bother with these fine words? Better leave me alone.
It's not your fault my luck has left me. If even your love,
Which went so deep and held on so hard, could come to
this end,
What does my life really matter?—only a gasp of air.

Satakam, 30

DEFINITION

My love before me, deliciously speaking, I never can tell
If my body is something only to hear with or only to
see with.

Satakam, 32

HISTORY

It's true; I'm terrible, you rolling at my feet, my anger
still tight as a noose.
Remember the fine and loving days when a crease of the
brows was the worst,
And silence the hardest penance we could inflict?
A smile was enough,
One lowered glance portending the full of our savour.
And now it has come to this.

Satakam, 38

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MEETING

Long separation, then meeting. O, how their limbs loosened.
Is it any surprise that the world they noted thereafter
seemed hardly born?
But the sunlight dragged itself slowly toward night,
while their stories
Lengthened like shadows, and bed had to wait on their
pleasure.

Satakam, 44

CHANGE

There was a time when we were a single body of love :
You were not the loved or lover, nor was I.
But you are the master now, and I am at your service.
My cruel unlucky life alone has brought us down to this.

Satakam, 69

THE VIGIL

She stands there staring down the road that leads a long way
for a husband to come,
Stands there until the dusk tells her she's tired
and tells her also
That travellers are done for today. So she heads toward her
house, but turns,
(So quick she hurts her neck) for a last chance—
perhaps, even now, perhaps . . .

Satakam, 76

RUSE

He'd arrived with a thousand plans, but the day crawled on
into night.

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And still the family, thoughtlessly cordial, sat here talking.
"I've been stung!" she cried, and backed off fanning herself,
With her hem, and, fanning, put out the lamp.

Satakam, 77

CONTROL

"I must go," he freed himself to say; I heard those sad
words calmly.
Out there, he turned to look and stopped. I did not
call him back.
And so I have an empty house. Leave me alone.
My life rubs raw,
Or living is my worst addiction, and these tears hypocrisy.

Satakam, 79

ESTRANGED

These men, friend, what are they but strangers?
My own husband said "Black" if I said "Black,"
And when I said, "White," would say, "Of course;
I didn't see right." And when I would say: "Let's move,"
He, packing already, would say, "Good. It was time to
move out," but agree with me if I said, "No."
He followed my mood like a worshipful servant.
But now..how can that stranger be a friend?

Satakam, 94

WAR GAMES

Helpless before him, I who could fight him back fault
by fault, helpless.
He falls at my feet, flatters my friends, hugs me when they
are gone,

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And kisses so hard, my anger won't keep; Oh, I'm not
yet beaten,
But that thief has put my mind in his pocket. How can I
keep myself from him?

Satakam, 95

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BILHANA

THE CONDEMNED LOVER

Her fairness, a golden string of *Campaka* flowers,
Her face, blown lotus, her body, tenderly downed;
Risen from sleep, she stretches, sensual, slow
She, desire, all I can think of now.

These I remember—palms as pink as *Asokas,*
Nipples caressed by the clustered pearls of her necklace,
A tremor of pale cheeks when they secretly smiled,
A walk as liquid and slow as the motion of swans.

Eyes near sleep after the long play of love,
Limb-weary, robes rumpled, heart spread out—
My swan princess of the lotus lake for love,
My mind will be there in death and for many lives.

By the flawless loveliness of all her parts
First beauty among the world's beauties,
Most dear vessel of *rasa* in love's theatre—
Even now she distracts me, stabbed by desire.

I can't forget her, can't, more than my life,
Her body burning with that loving heat,
Suddenly mourning, orphaned, pleading mercy,
Clinging to me like a sodden shawl.

I know death nears, closer and closer now.
But moved by something mightier still,
Forgetting Gods, I'm pulled, steady, to her,
My lovely, O, my loved. What can I do?

She is the shrine of passion's pilgrimage

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Where all love's sins are cleansed: that flow of love,
Its water perfumed like the lotus pollen—
To reach it, I would gladly give my life.

Lord Siva even yet chokes back the venom,
The Tortoise still holds up his load of Earth,
The Ocean still contains the buried fires:
The good gladly accept what they have to accept.

Caurapancasika

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THE WAY OF KINGS

Kings will spend everything on the breath
Of expensive doe-eyed girls and horses,
The flatterer's appetite for an insult,
The bold praises sung by poets—

Kings pass their hours like little children,
Angering, then cajoling girls.
Eager for news of horses, following
Servants or some hunting tale.

Royal actions, false or true,
Are copies, as if Kings were shadows,
Eating, drinking, growing, laughing,
Sitting, strolling, handing down gifts.

Ruled by women at night, by day
Kept in line by ministers—
Amazing that kings can still maintain
Delusions of their sovereignty.

Rajatarangini

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SRI HARSHA

MOONRISE AND A WOMAN ALONE

When they measured this time of man, of gods,
Of the cosmos, why didn't astronomers also
Reckon the awful difference in time
Between two together and two apart?

Ask the moon from what teacher
He has learned so well to start a fire!
Is it the poison in Siva's throat
Or is it the burning heart of the ocean?

Surely the killing of lonely brides
Was the crime of the moon that got it hurled
From Heaven, shattered on Night's black rock,
The sparks flying off as stars.

In bad times you get distracted,
Or else I'd have kept that moonless night.
If it comes again, I'll beg it to stay
And not have to face the moon's face again.

Pick up a heavy hammer and take
A mirror outside and set it there;
The minute the brutal moon shows its face,
Smash it (and him) to splinters. It's easy.

Naishadhiyacaritam, IV

NIGHTFALL

As though the Great Dancer, mindful of watchers,

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Takes over from that novice, the Evening—
His body stretching, fills up the stage;
Garlands of stars glow with his motion.

He scatters the bones from his necklace of skulls.
See how they spin out as millions of stars,
Beautifully rounding the edge of the heavens.
And He wears the moon for a crown in the night.

Time, the hunter, has felled the elephant, Day,
Whose trunk held lotuses of light,
And Twilight is streaming with his blood
And stars are jewels from his shattered head.

The Sun, great mendicant, done
With his round, searching out ways with his staff,
Now dips in the sea, his tawny robes
Hung out in the evening sky like clouds.

After using a mountain for touchstone to test
The value of sunset—those long yellow bars—
The sky, that fool, trades a ball of gold
For a glittering heap of cowrie shells.

Time plucks the ripened pomegranate,
Sun, and casts the skin off, dusk,
And finished with the seeds, their juices
Sucked, spits them out as stars.

The universe is a great hall, held up
By columns at the cardinal points.
Borers have pierced the ancient ceiling
And scattered dust from the holes—the stars.

Naishadhiyacaritam, XXII

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JAYADEVA

SONG OF KRISHNA REPENTANT

She saw those girls billowing up
Around me and simply walked away;
I did not dare to call her back
Because I am guilty and feared what she'd say.
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

What will she be doing and saying
In the long pain of her being away
And what can others matter, or wealth,
Or house or whether I live or die?
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

I can see her now wherever she is,
This red lotus, her face, this bee
Hovering restless over the flower,
Her brow dark, bunched by fury.
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

And though she wholly surrounds my heart,
How will I find her, loving again,
And where should I hunt in these blinding trees,
And how much more calling and to no end?
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

O slender Radha, I know how jealousy,
Entering the opened heart, can sting,
But blind to where you've lost yourself,

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I'm helpless to ease your suffering.
My God! She has gone off ranging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

Why not come out and ask to play
Our old game where you would hide
So I could surprise you with a hug
And you pretend a shocked pride.
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

Forgive this once, and you'll discover
No more pain by what I do.
Come love, and ease my eyes with yours;
My body burns with its want of you.
My God! She has gone off raging now
Because her beauty has been ignored.

So Jayadeva, sprung from the town
Of Kindubilva much as the moon is sprung
From the sea, a worshipper of Krishna,
Puts Krishna's feelings in this song.

Gita-Govinda, III

RADHA'S FRIENDS TO KRISHNA

Sandal paste cannot now soothe her as she stares
At agonizing moonlight, she whom desire rules;
Spring wind seems poisoned by the snakes it blew on,
Wound in the sandal trees of southern hills.
Cut off you, she is all misery,
O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

She weaves a coat of mail from dabbled lotus petals,
Water streaming down her breast, over her heart—

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Something to hold off the endless shower
Of Kama's bolts, that aim to fire all earth.
Cut off from you, she is all misery,
O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

She makes herself a bed of flowers
As if for penance, whose reward will be
Pleasure and your embrace, a bed
Of Kama's barbs made, through her tossing, lovely.
Cut off from you, she is all misery,
O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

Her lovely lotus face is overflowing tears,
So that her eyes seem heavy rain clouds, dark and wet.
That face looks like the moon, his nectar bleeding
From the fangs of Rahu eating light.
Cut off from you, she is all misery,
O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

Being alone, she traces out, using dye
Of musk, your figure modelled as the Lord of Love,
And puts a spray of mango blossom in his hand,
Draws a fish below, then worships there.
Cut off from you, she is all misery,
O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

But as she prays to Love, at every verse she cries:
"Madhava, I am fallen at your feet; and you turn
Your face away and even the Moon,
That hive of nectar, makes my body burn."
Cut Off from you, she is all misery,

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O Madhava, she who,
Remembering you, loses herself in you
As though she could hide from Kama's arrows.

This plea by her close friend for Radha—she who tends
The cows and grieves for absent Krishna—should be sung
By those who see it all in their minds;
It is for them Jayadeva makes this verse.

Gita-Govinda, IV

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KSHEMENDRA

ADVICE TO A YOUNG PROSTITUTE

Now listen to me, child, for your own good.
Art you'll learn for yourself in time with practice.

But you don't get money—richer than life itself—
By faith, virtue, looks, or learning. Sense brings it in.

In this world, few are smart enough to know it all.
'I am the world,' the fat and drowsy spider thinks.

In the three worlds, gods, men, and nagas are weak in the head.
Helpless to act when they should, they merely ripen like some disease.

Just look: What did the Lord—the senseless Maker—do?
Why should the beauty of woman's breast be quick to pass as lightning?

Do you think it shows much wisdom in that creating clown
That pumpkins don't yield oil, or elephants bear wool?

When He looked for those jewels, Vishnu made Himself plenty
Of trouble, using a mountain to stir the ocean.
But why didn't He conjure a woman up for the job,
Trained in the art of loving, dearer than any jewels?

Look at Siva: a waning moon at his head, followers naked,
Wife half naked. I ask: What good that He's friends with the God of Wealth!

He smears himself with ashes, but holds a girl in his arms;
He's named the Detached, but always surrounded by servants.

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And clinging to that bull—is that right, or truthful, or honest?
As for Krishna, openly fooling with those girls. That's
supposed to be wise!

Why does that lucky seducer of girls, the Sun,
Finally cool down at the end as he travels his route?
Isn't the best looking girl only waiting her price?
For that price, a woman will take the most blistering lover.

For Rama, his big hurry to catch the golden deer.
For Yudhisthira, his playing with loaded dice,
For Janamejaya, his jealous fit over the brahmana—
All men travel one fatal road, over the bridge of stupidity.

In this stupid world, what chance is there for simple women?
We live only by the grace of those stupider than ourselves.

The prostitute must live by lies, always dodging the truth.
By the truth, she dies, as noble women do by drink.

For a prostitute the truth means her ruin.
Her wealth and looks are built on lies.
The honest girl who shows herself!—
But who'd go to the poorhouse for fun?

The merchant is ruined by giving, the prostitute by truth.
The teacher by meekness, the bureaucrat by kindly acts.
Lying for prostitutes, like swindlers, is an art.
"What a job!" They say, full of admiration.

When I was young and had travelled the whole of the sea-
bound world,
I went, all greedy, to Pataliputra, that haven of whores.

The madames there, all wise, seeing my pitiful skill,
Laughed in my face. I was so shamed I sank through the dirt.

Because of that shame I gave up my girlish pride and went
To Ganesa's shrine and there I fasted by the door.

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Worn with hunger, I fell asleep, and, dreaming, saw
Siva's Son,
Who asked me over and over, "How much fasting have
you done?"

Pretending mental anguish, I replied
"Two whole months' worth—as I vowed."

That clever God, hearing me, smiled and said, "In fasting
Even and dreams you have not swerved from the path of lies.

"This pleases me, child, this resolute holding on to untruth.
You will have all the arts of fraud and joy in them."

That's how Ganesa blessed me long ago and why I say
The whore's well-being and wealth is all in her tricks.

Wealth sharpens you and sharpness brings in wealth.
In this human world the two depend on one another.

Here, whoever is rich goes first before the crowd,
Irresistible, adored, wise as four-mouthed Brahma himself.

And, of course, the poor are criminals or badly bred,
Callous, lazy, bad, like Rahu or like Saturn.

The sandalwood, though fruitless, is sought because its shade
Is cool and scented. So with the rich, who may yield nothing.

The rich—even their swords (well-oiled) are smooth
and glossy.
The poor—even their own hair ends up dry and dull.

The gifts of gifted men who are poor dry up unused,
Shrivel like a widow's breasts on her useless trunk.

It absolves from stored-up sin, fends off fierce curses,
Is virtue in the bank for families, scouring all stains.
Thus wealth: the brightest pilgrimage, the chief austerity.

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The ground of good, the object of all faith. Bow, then,
to wealth!

"I'm awfully good looking, you know!" Give up that vanity,
my girl.
Peacock starves in the woods; crow, that rogue,
gets fat on the sacrifice.

Samayamatrka, IV

THE PROSTITUTE'S FRIENDS

Close friends are the school where whores can learn their
lovers' points.
Their wealth, traits, weaknesses, their likes and hates.
The rich man's only son, one who's lost his father young,
A credulous king's servant, a merchant's son jealous in love,

He who hopes to prove he is able, he who swears he abstains,
The nitwit, the gullible patron of swindlers, the spoilt prince.

The hayseed, the one who won't discuss his birth, the
popular singer,
The one who has suddenly come to power, the hunter whose
game is money,
The conformist dummy, the well-read man tipsy with
self-esteem,
The heavy drinkers, these are the walking wishing-trees to
a whore.

Samayamatraka, V

AGEING WHORE

First housemaid, then house girl, then madam:
When all possibilities are used up, the old whore goes
ascetic.

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COURT SCRIBE

He can't read what others have written, nor others what
he has written.
What's more, he can't even read what he himself has written.

FAKE SCHOLAR

Working his fingers, arguing in crowds many things
inside his head,
His lips act out silent prayer. He's lost in high thought on
busy streets.

BAWDY VERSES

O, Mound of Venus, your feats are like the feats of
the Creator,
Making the proudly risen fall, the lowly fallen rise.

The Tricks that women's eyes can play on men, the
sidelong glance,
The lifted brow, all come back to trouble their innocent
thighs.

Pliant before, but stiffening when he comes to actual
business,
After, pliant again, the business man, the cock at work.

The crotch of the whore, when shaved, is a pale expanse,
like the slopes
Of the sunrise hill that the sun's horses have grazed
completely bare.

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The Death God grins at the ardent body builder, the Earth
at the man
Who piles up wealth, the faithless wife at the husband
fondling her son.

REASON FOR SURVIVAL

This world endures only because the wishes of these
are unfulfilled;
Debtors, undertakers, hangers-on, crooked politicians.

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JAGANNATHA

POET'S VAUNT

His days once passed in the clear water of Manasa Lake,
Perfumed by pollen the bees shook down from lotus blossoms.
How could this swan, this lord of swans, live in this filthy ditch,
Made filthier still by this croaking crowd of frogs?

His verse is nectar; the hands of the Muse
Forget themselves on the strings of Her own Vina.
Can anyone not keep time with his head to the verse of
this master,
Sweet to the hearing, anyone but human beasts or the
beasts' own Lord?

Bhamini Vilasa

RADHA FINDS KRISHNA

She went to sell curds in the street, hoping to earn a
few cowries,
But right on the road she found the crowning blue jewel.

Bhamini Vilasa

A WORD OF WARNING TO THE SOUL

My soul, I tell you, watch out. Don't take up with
that cowherd
Whose skin is the hue of fresh rainclouds, the one who pastures
His herd in Vrindavana. He's shrewd. He'll charm you first
with his smile,
Then his looks. Your senses will fail, and then oblivion!

Bhamini Vilasa

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BHASA

MOONRISE

The moonrise, pale as the dried date palm;
Comfort of young girls, lamp of the highway.
Its shine tumbles into the pits of dark
Like milk flooding the caking mud of pools.

Carudattam, I. 29

FLIGHT OF CRANES

Straight sometimes, sometimes scattered, or curving,
Or, as they wheel, crooked as the Great Bear's fork,
Their flight gleams like a contour of sky,
Pale as a snake's belly, its skin just shed.

Svapna-Vasavadattam, IV. 2

FOREST FIRE

Wind driving it on, this fire devours the tree;
From the hollow of its trunk, birds fly up: breath finding
wing.

Now that it has gobbled its fill of the forest—
All trees, all shrubs and undergrowth—the fire
Follows dry grass to the bank of the river, as though,
After so heavy a meal, to quench its thirst.

Pancaratram, I. 11,13

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GIVING

Whatever is learned, given the time, is lost.
Even the deepest rooted trees go down.
Water dries away, even the lake.
Only the gift or the sacrifice endures.

Karnabharam, 22

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SUDRAKA

BEING POOR

Swans and cranes would snatch up the daily offerings
From this threshold the minute they were offered;
Now at this threshold, sunken under weeds,
The gnawing worm leaves offerings of his seed.

I am not saddened by the loss of riches,
For riches flow in and out with turns of luck.
This is what hurts: the golden prop removed,
Friendship grow suddenly feeble, start to totter.

When he has nothing, his words are nothing, even to family,
Friends turn away, miseries bristle, then loom larger;
Substance melts off, the glow of reputation fades,
Even the rotten acts of others stick to him.

Mrcchakatikam, I. 9,13,35

DARKNESS

My wide eyes are stopped as I enter the dark.
Opened still, they are sealed by blackness.

My body is lathered by dark; the sky showers soot.
Vision is wasted, as loyalty is an evil.

Mrcchakatikam, I. 33,34

MOON SETTING

The moon sinks, leaving all darkness;
Only one horn shows in the west,

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Like the point of an elephant's tusk,
As he settles down in murky water.

Mrcchakatikam, III. 6

STORM

The sky, flung with piling clouds worked by the wind
To wild and shifty shapes, seems like frescoed wall;
Now they are herons pairing, now a flight of swans,
Now fish and crocodiles rolled by the sea, now towered castles.

Clouds, dark as wet leaves have soaked up the sun;
Anthills, collapsed by rain, go down like elephants
showered with arrows;
Lightning flares like a lamp that someone bears up
and down in a mansion;
The moonlight was carried off like the wife of a helpless man.

At Indra's command, the clouds
Hoist up the earth with chords of streaming silver;
Like elephants harnessed with lightning,
They heave and shoulder against each other.

Treble on palm leaf, bass on shrubs,
Sharp on stones, soft on ponds,
The rain beats out its music, a Vina,
Its chords plucked by an accomplished hand.

Mrcchakatikam, V.

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HARSHAVARDHANA

DANCER

The wild hair has thrown off its beautiful binding of flowers;
The anklets, drumming against her feet, wail higher and higher;
The swinging necklace of pearl strikes her as if in revenge;
Whirling, she risks being broken in half by the weight of
those breasts.

Ratnavali, I

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VISAKHADATTA

COUNTERSPY

A man can also make a living from death—
If he works at it hard.
Look at us killers of spies, living by death
Which murders us all.

Mudrarakshasam, I.

AGE

Once good servants, like seeing and grasping for all your
needs,
The dying senses cannot even serve their own needs now.
Legs and arms falter; they will not, cannot, obey
your commands.
O Desire, age sets her feet on your head; your struggle
is useless.

Mudrarakshasam, III.1

THE KING'S FORTUNE

Wary of too much attention, cold to the weak who can't
hold her,
Scornful of fools, yet chary of those who know too much,
Fearful of courage, ready to mock the coward, the fortune
Of Kings is hard to please as a whore when she's
leading you on.

Mudrarakshasam, III.5

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AUTUMN NIGHT

Long wisps of clouds like shores of pale sand coming clear,
Cranes crowding the air, singing in flights,
The stars, like lilies, blossoming out of the dark,
As if the ten directions were flowing like rivers.

Mudrarakshasam, III.7

DIPLOMACY

Now, the aim is clear; now, too deep for knowing,
Now, well-rounded; now, thin from necessity,
Now, bare as barren; and now, bent to the ground with fruit;
Diplomacy—shuffling its hue like a man's fate or work of art.

Mudrarakshasam, V. 3

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BHAVABHUTI

LOVER'S TALK

Slowly and so close our faces touched,
We talked: without stopping, disconnected,
Arms in each other's arms relentlessly locked.
We didn't think about time, but the night did end.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, I. 27

FELICITY

The only human love—and lucky—is indivisible,
A moving constant through two changing lives, a place of rest,
Its sweet quality unaging though the lovers age, for age
Ripens it. It is what's left when all that taints is boiled away.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, I.39

RAMA

O that Rama was ever made aware
Only to be made aware of pain:
Now my life, like a cold spike, is driven
Into my heart, deeper with every breath.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, I.47

TREES ON THE GODAVARI RIVER

Elephants, scratching their raspy heads against the trees
on Godavari's banks,

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Shake the branches, which shake down their flowers, already
loosened by sun, and those flowers
Seem offered at noon to the waters. Pigeons and cocks,
sleepy with heat,
Cry from the leaf shade, while lesser birds pick at
shadowy bark for their supper.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, II.9

PRESENCE

All richness to him who loves her so,
She does not need to stir an inch
To show her love, displacing pain
By merely being all his pleasure.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, II.19

PANCAVATI

Sand where the stream once went, the great trees,
In their hundreds, stumps; and saplings are now great trees;
Nothing of what I knew except the mountains,
Unmoved rock which says: this is the place.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, II.27

TAMASA TO SITA

Detached by hopelessness, clouded by his misuse,
Charmed by his goodness, sad as he with his great
suffering,
Dissolved with love, your heart just now is many things,
Numbed by sudden meeting after so long apart.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, III.13

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A FATHER'S GRIEF

Janaka:
The terrible thing that was done to my girl cuts and cuts
at my heart,
Until its roots, quivering, spread the pain like a slow
poison.
I was struck a long time ago, but the wound is fresh,
a pulsing stab.
And the fury goes on, like a blade, sawing away at my
naked nerves.

Uttara-Rama-caritam, IV.3

RAMA'S SON

The flash of that glance reduces the three-fold worlds
to so much straw.
His stride has such a steady power it beats down the
earth that it shakes.
Merely a boy, and now already a mighty force to
contend with.
Is he the wrath of heroes embodied in one, or is he
their pride?

Uttara-Rama-caritam, VI.19

BOAST

Are there any around who mock my verses?
They ought to know I don't write for them.
Someone somewhere sometime will understand.
Time has no end. The world is big.

Malati-Madhavam, I.6

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PARTING LOOK

My love, as she left my side, looked back, softly turning
her head
And seemed a hundred-petalled lotus softly turned on its stalk;
Her look seemed a dart her lashes had painted with poison
and nectar, (poison
Of leaving, nectar of love;) that look has buried itself in
my heart.

Malati-Madhavam, I.30

MALATI

My love, as though at one with me, is mirrored in my heart,
figured in my mind,
Graven there, inlaid, a diamond inlay, never worn away,
and deeply cut.
It seems as if the God, Desire, had fixed her deep in my
heart with his five arrows.
Or my care, like threads, had woven her into its texture.

Malati-Madhavam, V.10

REPROACH

How to describe the fiery longing of my fawn-eyed friend?
I've never seen the moon's light limbs eaten away by fire.
But this I know—that beauty, the richest vision of the world,
The Lord's best work, will waste away, all because of you.

COSMIC DANCER

I

When He who handles the spear begins
His omnipotent dance, Nandi goes mad and pounds

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The drum, so Kumara's peacock dances too till the snake
Around Siva's neck draws in his hood, and, terrified,
Enters God's nostrils; the bees that hover the temples
Of rutting Ganesa, stirred up, start to hum, and send out
The Four Directions buzzing, till Ganesa Himself
Tosses his head and trumpets. May this turbulence bless
you forever.

II

When Siva's furious dance gathers speed, the elephant hide
At his waist flares up till its feet kick the moon on His
brow, and the nectar
Flows down on His garland of skulls so those skulls come
alive and cackle
Such hair-raising laughter that all the creatures pray
to the God.
And now, something new: the swarthy snakes, the armlets
of Siva,
Crushed by the violent motion of dancing, begin to spit out
A poisonous fire, their broad hoods flattened, a hideous sight,
And the mighty arms of the God as they stretch in their
turbulent sweeping
Glance off the heft of mountains and pitch them every
which way.
Then in His forehead the third eye opens, that eye
which blazes
With knowledge; and now it follows the moves of the dance
so the cosmos
Fragmented though it is, is woven into one thing
By that fiery orbit of seeing, as the tawny sparks of His eye
Go round like the trace of a torch that someone was
swinging; the stars
Are tossed by the flap of the banner fixed on His staff's
crushing end.
Then, at the peak, the attendants of Siva, all of them, demons
And devils, male and female, crazed by the dance of their Lord,
Start a clapping that tortures the ears of the tender Gauri
Who, shaken with terror, clutches the God as close as she can

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And, clutching Him, sends through her Lord a shudder of
molten delight.
And may this terrible dance bring to us what we desire.

Malati-Madhavam, I.2, V.23

COUNTRY COUPLE ASLEEP

They lie on fresh-cut paddy straw, both bed and pillow,
In a little hut of grass in the corner of the barley field.
The frost avoids the sleeping country people, as if her breasts,
Like large pots, steaming away, warded off the chill.

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BHATTANARAYANA

CALL TO A SACRIFICE

Bhima speaks:
We four, the ritual priests; Lord Hari, the overseer;
King Yudhishthira, with his anointed wife, the Sacrificer;
The Kauravas, sacrificial beasts. The point? Curing the shame.
The loud call is to glory, summoning the princes to form
at our side.

Venisamharam, I.25

ASVATTHAMA PLEDGES VENGEANCE

Whoever, proud of his courage, carries arms in the
Pandava troops,
Whoever belongs to the Pandava clan—child, adult,
sleeper in the womb,
Whoever saw that act or meets me, front to front,
in combat—
I'll kill them all in my fury, even kill the Great
Killer, Himself.

Venisamharam, III.32

KARNA'S RETORT

So I drive a chariot, or am son of a driver,
Or anyone else—so what?
Birth and family are all in the hands
Of the gods; in mine, my manhood.

Venisamharam, III.37

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DAMODARA MISRA

RAMA'S LAMENT

I wouldn't wear a garland because it might come between us,
Now rivers, oceans, mountains have come between us.

It is not that my dear is far off, or was taken from me;
I mourn because I carry this useless bow.

Hanumannatakam, IV

RAVANA BRAGS BEFORE ANGADA

My gardener is Indra, my doorman the Lord of a
thousand beams,
My umbrella-bearer the moon, wind-god and sea-god my
sweeper and washer,
The god of fire my scullion. Surely, you see that?
And still you praise Rama, that mortal meant as a tidbit for us.

Hanumannatakam, VII

MEGHANADA'S BRAG

Don't be afraid, little monkeys; these arrows of mine
which pierce the temples
Of Indra's elephant mount, would blush to touch your bodies,
And you, Lakshmana, move aside; you are not man enough
for my fury.
I, Meghanada, want Rama, whose frown has quelled
the ocean.

Hanumannatakam, IX

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BANA

FOREST FIRE

Lowering a little, then pluming upward, sometimes
breaking away,
Sometimes whimsically bending down as if to refresh himself,
Smoke from the forest on fire, like the shoulder
Of a young bison on the loose, striking sparks out of the
dry leaves.

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SANKARA

GRACE

The *Cataka*'s need, the *Cakora*'s too are answered
By a sky, though void, moved by their faith to take
the shape of cloud or moon.
So, to His devotees, Hari, though far beyond their
vision, speech or thought,
Rains down, for no apparent cause, delight, His Grace.

Prabodhasudhakara, 1

SING GOVINDA

The days and the nights, the dawns and the dusks,
The winters, the springs—these go and come back;
Time is a play; the life gives out,
But the breath of hope will not, will not.
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up,a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

Fire before, sun behind,
Chin on knees for long cold nights,
A hand for alms, a tree for coat,
But the breath of hope will not give out.
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up,a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

When making money is what you do,
Your family idolizes you,
Old, you hope they might repay,
But they won't give you the time of day.

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Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

Sticks for his legs, his skull bleached,
Gone in the teeth, his mouth a beak,
The old man needs a staff to stand,
But the breath of hope will not give out.
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

A small boy caught up in games,
A young man chasing girls,
An old man worried to death—
Who has time for the final Truth?
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

Where is the lust when age comes on?
When its water dries, where is the pond?
The money gone, where are the kin?
Get the Truth and there's no return.
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

As long as there's some life in the body,
People at home ask how yau are.
But when the breath leaves the body flat,
The wife herself wants no part of that.
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

Once you put on these rags for a robe,
And go beyond both evil and good,
There is no "I" or "you" or "this world,"

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What's all this restless hunting for?
Sing Govinda, sing Govinda, sing, you fool!
When Death rolls up, a mouth full of grammar
won't save you!

Carpata-panjarika

LA BELLE CHOSE

Who but a maggot would choose to enter this slimy hole,
Like the slit belly of a frog, hung upside down and bloated?

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ANANDAVARDHANA

MEANING

As one who wants light cares for the wick,
So he who wants truth watches the words.

Dhvanyaloka

DHARMAKIRTI

PRESTIGE

Valmiki had the ocean bridged with mountains borne by monkeys;
And Vyasa with Arjuna's arrows bridged the air; still no one thinks this overdone.
Here I am, word and meaning balanced out, yet people, wanting to fault
My verse, open their mouths wide. Prestige, I bow low before you.

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ABHINAVA GUPTA

TRADITION

And what's new about telling a truth already
Discovered, passed from mouth to mouth over
The long haul of time? Nothing. Couldn't they
Sue you—and win—if you said: "I've said something new"?

The mind is a great climber climbing higher
To see what's really there, the thing itself.
Why should it condescend to rest on ideas
Which are mere steps for spiralling up and up?

I know—it's hard, hard and misty, those first
Tries to see. Really to see. But this road
Means trying again, again, till the archways loom clear,
The Bridges and buildings lift into lucid place.

What was left behind by them, our fathers' fathers,
Isn't abandoned. It's carefully treated and saved.
What was left behind, if carefully treated and saved,
Is going to yield good things for those who will follow.

Abhinava Bharati, VI

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RAJASEKHARA

THE MOON'S FACES—I

Froth of the ocean's milk, snowy umbrella over the mountain's
crown,
Tilaka on the East's forehead, mirror to Night,
Royal Swan of Evening's lake, gold-maned lion rising from
the dark woods,
The laughing of the sky's lord, conch blown to rouse
the legions of night's lilies—all this, the Moon.

THE MOON'S FACES—II

The cat licks at the moonlight falling on his bowl like milk,
The young elephant grabs at the beams threading through
trees like lotus stalks,
Done making love, girls shake those rays from their beds
as if they were silks;
Drunk on her own glitter, the moon makes light of the
whole world.

LOVE—BEFORE AND AFTER

Living in separate houses, we were like shards welded by fire.
The hold of love, dearest, was better and stronger then.
And now we live in one house, merely as people—
I curse this estranging love and the long life of a woman.

AFTER THE BATH

From loosened knots of hair on these girls who have just
now bathed

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Their wet tresses slide heavily down their heavy hips;
And from those tresses water runs down in strings of drops
That draw pet swans, their necks stretching, to drink
these pearls.

RIVER

Daughter-in-law now mother-in-law, son now father:
Each vacancy as it occurs is filled by another.
The world goes by the river's logic: no parts, merely
An endless succession; no going back, but no vacant place.

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JINASENA

FLAME OF THE FOREST

The *Kimsuka* trees flared with their flaming crests as if
lovers, long
Apart, meeting again, had sighed out the fires of their longing

Harivamsa Purana, XIV

COCK-CROW

Then the cocks, used to the secrets of night, gorgeously
crested,
Began to crow, stretching their handsome wings,
Announcing the end of darkness, now shrill, now soft,
As though they were half fearing to wake the women of Yadu.

Harivamsa Purana, XLII

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ABHINANDA

VILLAGE IN WINTER

And now at dusk the villages look a little more relaxed:
Threshing floors around them glowing with stacks of paddies,
Smoke from burning cowdung rising in whispy coils that here
And there blend into the settling strands of early fog.

DURGATA

FAMINE

Mouse shrivelled to a bean, cat to a mouse, dog
To a cat, housewife to a dog, others beyond description.
The children, their eyes rolling with the tedium of
    hunger, crawl on the floor,
Too weary to waste a cry, and stare at their mother.

JAYANANDI

FROG IN WELL

This is the bowl of earth, this the sky's circle,
This the rock bottom of the lower world, this, rimmed by
    earth, the water.
Know this, know every thing. What else is there to know?
—The frog, poor idiot, croaks as hard as he can.

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SRI JIVADASA

FISHES IN THE SKY

That great fish, the moon, seeing at dawn, the Sun
Seeking a catch, dived deep into the sea of the sky.

Now that it's evening, the Sun gone off, thousands of starry minnows,
Slow and undaunted, rise to the blue-black surface of night.

KALIDASA II

SIMPLICITY

But last year too the spring winds blew and cuckoos
Called, and the year before too, dear friend.
How is it then that only this year my heart
Beats suddenly faster with desire?

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SILA BHATTARIKA

MEMORY

The same husband who first had me the same spring nights,
The same breezes from the *Kadamba,* scented the more by
Malati blossoms,
And I, the same; yet my heart aches for Narmada's banks,
The shading stand of canes, the games love played back there,

UMAPATIDHARA

OF MURALA'S BANKS

His hands hurt her, his play makes her sick,
His petting withers her heart, his words distract her;
For her mind keeps running wishfully back to the thick stand
Of cane on Murala's banks where she went so often before
she got married.

VIDYA

TO THE RIVER MURALA

Smooth banks of sand, thick shade of cane hung over the water,
The rustle of cooling winds, bearing delicious spray—
All supplies for endless good times for the brave at love—
Tell me, Murala, who dreamed up this marvelous notion?

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VIKATANITAMBA

RIVER OF BEAUTY

This woman is a strange river of beauty:
In her, lotuses sway to the moon,
And are those elephants' heads submerged?
Banana stems lie by the lotus stalks.

VIJJIKA

THE PRIDE OF A WOMAN POET

Dandin lied when he said the Goddess of Poetry was wholly white.
He hadn't met me, Vijjika, dark as a blue lotus petal.

VIRASARASVATI

MESSAGE FROM THE COWHERD GIRL

You, on your way to Mathura, go up to Krishna's door and say this:
"Yamuna's waters burn once more with Kaliya's fiery gall."

YOGESVARA

INVOCATION

"Tell me, Mother, what does my father hide in his cupping hands?"
"A luscious fruit he's not going to give me. Take it yourself!"
Urged by his mother, Ganesa wrestles his father's fingers,
Breaking his dawn meditation. So Siva smiles. May that smile preserve us!

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ANONYMOUS

BELOVED

The memory of her sears, the sight of her is maddening,
Her touch drives a man crazy. Yet she's called Beloved!

ANONYMOUS

CROWNING MISFORTUNE

The husband old, blind, bed-ridden; the house a shambles
And the monsoon arrived with no news of the far-off son;
The daughter-in-law heavy with child, and now the pitcher
with precious
Hoarded oil goes smash. The wife gives way to a steady moan

ANONYMOUS

MOON

Night is the girl who carries water, pouring moonlight on
the sky's court
From a pitcher shaped of crystal, etched with a pattern
of leaves.

ANONYMOUS

SADHUS

Having spent half the morning raking over the king and
the upper classes,
Their hands washing the alters, gathering flowers or
Kusa grass,
They spend their day pretending holy breathing and
meditation,
Their half-shut eyes devoted to watching the breasts of
bathing girls.

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THE RIVER AJAKARANI

When the flight of white cranes,
Alarmed by the looming black clouds,
Flutters in search of shelter—
The river Ajakarani delights me.

When the flight of pure white cranes,
Alarmed by looming black clouds
Searches for nests and finds no nest—
The river Ajakarani delights me.

Who would not be delighted
By the *Jamuns* on either bank
Making the riverside seemly
At the back of my cave?

Without accompanists,
The frogs keep sounding their lutes.
Today is not for keeping away from the stream.
The Ajakarani is lucky, lovely, inviting.

Theragatha

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A DIALOGUE IN COUNTERPOINT

Dhaniya: The rice bowl hot, my cows milked,
My house on the bank of the Mahi,
My roof well-thatched, fire in my hearth—
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: Anger quenched, stains washed off,
I lie tonight on the bank of the Mahi.
My shelter bare, the passion burned out,
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Dhaniya: There are no more gnats or mosquitos;
Cattle browse on the river-bed green.
They could endure the rain if it came.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: Poised in this perfect yogic position,
I have crossed the river of birth and rebirth.
I don't need Yoga any more.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Dhaniya: My woman is faithful, loving, and lovely,
She can give me pleasure all night long.
I've never heard a word against her.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: My mind is faithful and free, steadied
By meditation all night long.
No evil can cling to me now.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Dhaniya: I am no one's servant; I work for myself.
And my sons are well and their own masters.
I never hear a word against them.

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Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: I serve no master at all, I move
Through the world and don't have to work
for myself,
Don't have to serve for what I need.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Dhaniya: I own draught cattle, I own calves
Milch cattle I own and also
Heifers, and own a bull in stud.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: I own neither draught cattle nor calves,
Nor own milch cattle or heifers,
Nor own no bull in stud.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Dhaniya: I have nailed nails that can't be pulled out,
I have made tough new tethers
Which the headstrong calves can't snap.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you want!

Buddha: I have snapped all tethers like a great bull;
Shaken off chains like a tusker a net of vines.
I will never lie in a womb again.
Raincloud, rain as hard as you can!

Dhaniya Sutta

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SITUATION

He at her feet to calm her. The kid suddenly hopping
onto his back.
She is still furious, but can't help laughing.

Gatha-saptasati, I

ADVICE

Youth sweeps by like a flash flood, days drop into the past,
And nights don't look back. Why, child, all this wasteful
fuss?

Gatha-saptasati, I

LOVE REJOINED

When, after a break, love joins again, but the crack is all
too visible,
The savour flattens; as the taste of water, boiled and cooled,
is flattened.

Gatha-saptasati, I

YET HER FURY SLIPS AWAY

Furious, sworn to fury against this guilty husband—
yet her fury slips away,
Sighingly, as sand slips through a closed fist.

Gatha-saptasati, I

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LOVE WITHERS

If we are apart too long, love withers, and withers if we are
too long together;
And withers if we listen to talk, and withers, anyway,
because..it withers.

Gatha-saptasati, I

YOUR SINS ARE COUNTLESS

Disgusting, how can I forgive? Your sins are countless;
the ones you've committed,
You commit right now, or will, soon enough. Which ones
forgive? You name them.

Gatha-saptasati, I

VISION

Aunt, wistfully unsatisfied, I saw him only a minute.
It was like real thirst drinking in a dream of water.

Gatha-saptasati, I

HEADSTRONG

Heart, just keep bumping down this hurrying stream,
running aground over and over,
And one day someone is going to carry you home as fuel
for fire.

Gatha-saptasati, II

CLOUDS LIFTING

The clouds which clung to the Vindhya's slopes lift and
peel off,

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As if the mountain were shedding a skin.

Gatha-saptasati, II

DECEIVED

Dear, it's got to be that love without deception simply
doesn't exist in this world;
Why else are there separations? Or, separated, who
could live?

Gatha-saptasati, II

FATE

His image still lives in my eyes, his touch on my skin, his
words in my ears.
His heart is buried in mine. Where can fate find a
seam for its wedge ?

Gatha-saptasati, II

AGONY

She gnaws, like a guilty foreboding, at my heart all day,
all days,
Agony that won't be pushed off for a minute even.

Gatha-saptasati, II

BEFORE THE MIRROR

There is no way to tell him what damage he's done my heart;
His is a mirror which gives my pain back, but cannot take it in.

Gatha-saptasati, III

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CALENDAR

One scratch per day—so she was to reckon separation
on their wall.
Noon of the first day had not come—a thousand years of
scratches on the wall.

Gatha-saptasati, III

FIRE, THO' IT BURNS

Fire, tho' it burns in the tavern, burns also in the
sacrificial pyre.
People are not to be abandoned should they fall into evil
situations.

Gatha-saptasati, III

IN LIFE'S AFTERNOON

My friends, gone; the trees we played under, mere stumps;
Older now, we have seen even love yanked from its ground
by its roots.

Gatha-saptasati, III

BEAUTY

Wherever your eyes fall first, they'll stay put.
No one has seen her wholly, all at once, and no one can.

Gatha-saptasati, III

LOVE LETTER

Hand shaking; fingers limp and clammy; pen unmanageable—

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I can't even get past "Dearest"; how can I write the
rest of this thing?

Gatha-saptasati, III

SHE MEANT TO FLING INCENSE

She meant to fling incense at him in fun, but it left her moist
Passionate hand as so much delicately-scented spray.

Gatha-saptasati, IV

FORLORN

The young farmer, his wife gone to her father's, stupidly
stares at her favorite places,
As if from each some gold that was buried had been dug
up and stolen.

Gatha-saptasati, IV

RAIN

The downpour is so heavy, it's like the cloud using draw
ropes to lift the earth,
With ropes of rain, and, failing darkly scowls.

Gatha-saptasati, V

THE CRIPPLED MANGO TREE

Am I well? How could I be? Let the crippled mango at
the door tell you,
A new shoot at its top—calamity come to blossom.

Gatha-saptasati, V

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OTHER DAYS REMEMBERED

The wealth of our town—the young, and my own
wild-running days: the people make it song.
And I sit listening to myself become the past, a good story.

Gatha-saptasati, VI

SPRING

No blossoms on the mango, no cuckoo call. Nevertheless,
My heart, wanting him, says spring.

Gatha-saptasati, VI

SUMMER HEAT

The buffalo, dazed by the lash of the sun, sees the snake as
a little creek and licks it;
The snake drinks the buffalo's drool—a gush of water
from a black rock.

Gatha-saptasati, VI

STORM

Strange—the clouds, crazy to get there first, collided
in Heaven's courtyard
Just as the rains began. Strange that so perfect a roof
should leak like a sieve.

Gatha-saptasati, VI

HURRICANE

Catching it by the throat, the hurricane flung the
cloud down the slopes;

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A ruined sprawl, its heart still pounded in flashes of lightning.

Gatha-saptasati, VI

PICTURED EMBRACE

A few lines—not even color—it is the artist's skill alone
That keeps this pictured lover from ever letting go.

Gatha-saptasati, VII

IRRITATION

The tales begin with him, flourish with him, and die with him.
Mother, is there only one man in this town?

Gatha-saptasati, VII

SUMMUM

If you want some blessings, work at getting a lover first.
There is no pleasure known that doesn't start with a lover.

Gatha-saptasati, VII

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ANONYMOUS

ENDURANCE TEST

Kissed a hundred times, hugged a thousand, loved often
And still more: no sense of routine with the right one.

ANONYMOUS

ADMIRATION

Virtues are only virtues when someone is there to prize
them,
The lotus only a lotus when the sun lauds it with light.

ANONYMOUS

THE GIFT OF POVERTY

In this world, better to be a leafless stump
Than a wretch who would freely give but is hopelessly poor.

ANONYMOUS

A HINT

Clumsy! Pick up what's on the ground; don't shake
the *Shephali* branches.
That jangle of your armlets irritates your father-in-law.

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ANONYMOUS

NOTA BENE

The bride's youth, looks, charm, and liveliness depart
when he departs
And return when he returns. An odd coincidence!

ANONYMOUS

COUNTRY GIRL

I grew up in a village, live in a village, and can't even
imagine the look of a town;
But I can take the townsmen from their wives. I am—what
I am.

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PRAVARASENA

AFTER RAIN

The sky's branches—South, West, North, and East,
crazily shaken
In the monsoon, are still again, the clouds fallen away.

In the lowlands, the days pass in fresh light, not dry, not moist.
The glitter of pools calls for a plunge in such pleasing waters.

The sky is a bright sea; clinging to the shores of night,
The clouds are oysters that have scattered their pearls as stars.

Rinsed clean by the rain, the sky looks far away,
The slip of moon close, sharp, nearly transparent.

Ravanavaho, I

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VAKPATIRAJA

THE POET'S IMAGINATION

What is seems not to be; what is not seems as if it is;
And sometimes what is seems what it is. This is a good
poet's craft.

Poets of old went wrong being bound to time. They had no
tracks to follow.
Poets now fail, straining to do again the great labors of
those who went before.

You might ask: what's left that old poets haven't seen
already on their way?
But the prospect is always open; to a new poet everything
is new.

The bad poet goes crazy hunting a proper theme to work.
The good poet, his mind on making, finds them waiting.

Gaudavaho

DESERT

Here the sun's rays seem pale as frost, a shimmering mirage
Of wide water flashes back the slanting light.

In scalding wind, travellers scoop from the river's drying bed
Water on which blown sand keeps dropping with a hiss.

Even the shade of branches burns, the air choked with the
dust of homing cows.

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The heat grows hotter after noon; the villages sit and bake
like furnaces.

Storms of sand grind off the soil, leaving the earth bare;
The roads seem made of fine-ground sandstone piled up by
the wind.

Gaudavaho

HILL LANDSCAPE

Smoke from brush fires is darkened with dust;
Any way you look seems twilight.

Even by day the wooded slopes from this distance look dark
And smoky, under the shadow of the mountains beyond them.

The peaks look very far, but the slopes, curved out like
hips, loom nearer.
The mountains seem dull at the crest, more and more bright
toward the base.

Smoke from the village darkens the groves that surround it;
The coming of night darkly outlines the hills.

Gaudavaho

DAWN

When dawn comes, the trees swim in its gold.
The fruit, though green, ripens into gold.

Gaudavaho

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ANONYMOUS

MORNING SONG

But, darling, I warned you: don't keep this your temper
up too long—
Suddenly it will not be night; day will stare us hard in the face!

ANONYMOUS

IDENTITY CRISIS

It is only when a girl is herself that she's able to
speak her mind,
But in the confusion of seeing her love, who can
remember herself?

ANONYMOUS

THE WISH

If I could find my lover alone, I'd do something unheard
of: I'd let him absorb me,
Water soaking into a new earthen jar, making it cool
and fragrant.

ANONYMOUS

ALTERNATIVES

O Brahma, you have made very few who are flawless in all
their parts.
The suave are deceitful, the straightforward are simple as oxen.

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ANONYMOUS

NECESSARY EVIL

My love has wronged me; nevertheless bring him here
every day.
Fire may burn the house down; nevertheless you can't do
without it.

ANONYMOUS

CONSUMMATION

My limbs were not tangled in his, my lips didn't touch
his, my friend.
I kept looking at his lotus face and knew the
loving consummation.

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KUKKURI-PADA

THE BRIDE

The Bride in broad day will run from a crow.
Come Night, she will enter a house full of ghosts.

CATILLA-PADA

SOUNDING

Existence, this deep river, pours on with such power.
Both banks muddy, unfathomable out in midstream.

LUIPADA

GNOMICS

"There is no being, there can be no non-being."
Who can trust in a faith that denies these both?

How, by revealed knowledge or study, explain
What cannot be known by hue or shape or sign?

And what to explain, and to whom, the ultimate?
Like the moon on water, neither true or false.

Lui says: why bother over being and non-being?
I have climbed above the four bad notions. I am free.

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MY BOAT

My ship, Compassion, is laden with the gold of nothingness.
There is no space left for the silver of flashing form.

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NOTES

p. 51 Vak — Goddess of Speech, as also of creative activity, later identified with Sarasvati. According to one legend, Vak or Sarasvati was the daughter of Brahma, one of the trinity of Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, respectively the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. Brahma was infatuated with Vak and Rudra (Siva in the fierce aspect) took up his bow and chased Brahma to destroy him. Vak, who is the first person in this hymn, handed the bow to Rudra.

p. 51 Brahman — Literally, 'the incantor of a hymn', is the god of creation, god of destiny and the first Seer of the revealed knowledge of the Veda.

p. 51 Rudra — (lit. 'the shining one')—one of the Vedic gods of the middle region, prone to anger; later developed into Siva, the god of destruction.

p. 52 Ushas — (lit. 'the burning one')—the goddess Dawn, consort of Surya, the Sun god; aptly described as 'the bride of the Sun, clothed in resplendent colours.'

p. 54 Varuna — (lit. 'the enveloper')—the nocturnal Sun, god of mysteries, protector of the moral conscience, god of the waters and of the underworld.

p. 55 Parjanya — The cloud god, a friend of Indra.

p. 57 Aranyani — The presiding deity of forests.

p. 58 Pushan — ('the nourisher'), the nourishing solar divinity, god of the herdsmen.

p. 60 Purusha — The Universal Being, (literally, 'that which resides in a body'), visualised both as an anthropomorphic cosmic being and the unrevealed universe, both the sacrificer and the sacrificial object.

p. 60 Virat — 'A higher regal presence', man in the cosmic aspect.

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p. 61 Sadhya — Sadhyas are semi-divine beings, also the older gods becoming in course of time subsidiary to the new gods.

p. 61 Brahmana, Kshattriya, Vaisya, Sudra — The Four *Varnas,* main divisions of later Vedic social structure; the Brahmana being the hieratic and intellectual group; the Kshattriya the warriors, the ruling group; the Vaisya the husbandsmen and traders; the Sudra the working and the occupational classes.

p. 61 Indra — 'the virile One', the central divinity in the early Vedic phase, later also the Lord of the Gods, the god of rain, wind and cloud.

p. 61 Agni — The Fire God, a messenger of the gods, bearer of offerings at a sacrifice; a terrestrial deity, god of the homestead and closest to man.

p. 61 Vayu — The Wind God (or gods, said to be forty-nine in number in Puranic lore). Vayu was father of the great monkey hero of the *Ramayana,* Hanuman, and the great *Mahabharata* hero, Bhima. Vayu is also the god of strength.

p. 62 Prajapati — the Progenitor, the great ancestor.

p. 62 The Golden Germ (Hiranyagarbha) is the cosmic egg, i.e. the unmanifest cosmos which later broke into the manifest universe.

p. 67 Kama — The God of Desire, God of Love, son of Vishnu and Lakshmi. Kama has a bow of flowers, strung with a string of bees; the five arrows are five flowers characteristic of the spring. Kama's consort is Rati (pleasure).

Kama is often a decoy who diverts the ascetic from his austerities with the help of celestial nymphs (*apsara*) and the season of spring (Vasanta). Kama was burnt to ashes when he attempted to disturb Siva in meditation; he thus became Ananga, the Bodiless One.

p. 67 Mitra Varuna — two aspects of the Vedic solar god, one the diurnal sun, the other the nocturnal. The two are sometimes grouped together.

p. 75 Naciketas (Nachiketas) — the questioner in the Katha Upanishad. Assigned by an angered father to Yama, the

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God of Death, Naciketas goes to the latter to seek the meaning of life and death and life after death. Yama, pleased with the youth's earnest search for truth, first tests him by offering him various temptations and then initiates him into the knowledge of the self.

p. 82 Vidula — The story of Vidula and her son Sanjaya is used in the *Mahabharata* as an episode to extol the virtues of unrelenting heroic action and the path of valour laid down for the Kshattriyas. Sanjaya, a fugitive from the battle, is admonished for his cowardice.

p. 85 Vidura — A cousin of the blind king Dhrtarashtra, to whom he tried to propound the way of righteousness and to point out the injustice being done by the Kauravas to the Pandavas. Failing in the attempt, he withdrew completely from the scene of the Great Battle, returning to console Dhrtarashtra after the fighting was over.

p. 86 Yaksha — in the Yaksha-Yudhishthira episode, the latter is asked four questions by the Yaksha, who held the four younger Pandavas captive in unconsciousness. Yudhishthira passes the test and his brothers are restored to consciousness by the Yaksha.

p. 91 *Tika* — The bright mark on the forehead, an auspicious sign, indicating that the wearer is not a widow.

p. 91 Pushya — is one of the twentyseven constellations which map out the transition of the planets. The full moon is in conjunction with Pushya in the month of Pausha, corresponding to December.

p. 94 *Ketaka* (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) — a shrub with serrated leaves, bearing highly fragrant flowers in the late rainy season and early autumn.

p. 94 *Kutaja* (*Wrightea antidysenterica*) — a wild flowering tree, blossoming in July; conventionally signifying the advent of rains.

p. 95 *Kadamba* (*Nauclea cadamba*) — a large flowering tree, bearing ball-like flowers in the rainy season.

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p. 97 *Kurari* — A bird which emits a shrieking cry on dark winter nights.

p. 97 Mukunda — An epithet of Krishna.

p. 99 Menaka
Himalaya
Parvati — According to the Purana story, Himalaya is the Lord of Mountains and Menaka his consort. Sati, Siva's first wife, burnt herself in the sacrificial fire at her father's place and was reborn as the daughter of Himalaya and Menaka. She was named Parvati, 'daughter of the Mountain', and was also called Uma from saying 'no' to every proposal of marriage except with Siva. To attain her wish she performed severe penance, being first frustrated by Siva's anger (which consumed Kama in fire), and then succeeding after severer austerities.

p. 100 *Sirisha* (*Albizzia Lebbek*) — A summer-flowering tree—the flowers are tender and fluffy and have a soft perfume. They are sometimes worn in the ear. Because of their tenderness, they are often compared to the cheek or the throat.

p. 102 *Asoka* (*Jonesia asoka*) — A flowering tree, bearing large clusters of fiery-red blossoms in spring. Poetic conceit has it that the tree blossoms on being struck by the feet of beautiful damsels.

p. 102 *Karnikara* (*Thevetia neriifolia*) — The yellow oleander, a small tree bearing yellow trumpet-shaped flowers in spring and summer. The flowers are sacred to Siva.

p. 102 *Sinduvara* (*Vitex negundo*) — The pink-budded jasmine. Flowers in the spring, broadcasting a light perfume.

p. 102 *Vimba* (*Momordica monodelpha*) — A creeper known for its fruit which ripens a bright crimson-red. Because of its colour, it is often compared to women's lips.

p. 103 Rati — wife of Kama who laments after Kama is reduced to ashes by the wrath of Siva on his austeriries being disturbed.

p. 104 Madhu — ('the sweet one'), one of the epithets of spring; Companion of Kama.

p. 104 *Kusa* — A coarse grass with sharp edges, used extensively in rituals and regarded as sacred.

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p. 106 *Kasa* (*Saccharum spontaneum*) — A reedy wild grass growing by the woodside; bearing long while brush-like flowers, characteristic of the autumn.

p. 108 Aja — son of Dilipa and Sudakshina, married Indumati, an *apsara* born a as a mortal due to a curse. Indumati met her death at the touch of a garland from the celestial world brought by Narada, the minstrel sage. Aja mourns for her and renounces the world.

p. 110 *Mrdanga* — A double-ended drum.

p. 113 Urvasi and Pururava — A development of an earlier Vedic myth. Urvasi, an *apsara,* was born as a mortal due to a curse. She accepted Pururava's love with the stipulation that after bearing him a son she would return to the celestial world. Eventually, Pururava's inconsolable grief at her disappearance ends in a re-union.

p. 115 *Mandara* (*Erythrina Indica*) — the Indian coral tree, sacred to Siva and Parvati.

p. 115 Kubera (Kuvera) — Guardian deity of the north, also god of Wealth. In Puranic lore he is the officer of the treasury in Siva's household.

In the *Meghaduta* story, Kubera punished a favourite attendent Yaksha for negligence and banished him from the celestial city of Alaka.

p. 116 Yaksha — banished for a year, spent his exile at Ramagiri in the central part of India. The onset of the rainy season fills the Yaksha with inconsolable longing and he invokes the cloud to carry a message to his beloved across territory which he describes.

p. 117 *Syama* — A creeper with dark foliage.

p. 118 Sundari and Nanda — In Buddhist legend Nanda was a cousin of the Buddha and married Sundari, a beautiful girl. The Buddha came to his door as a mendicant when Nanda was dallying with his bride. Later remorse urged him to go to the Buddha—never to return.

p. 119 Tathagata — 'the Attained One', an epithet of the Buddha.

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p. 122 Gandharva — One of a celestial community of musicians and dancers.

p. 122 Apsara — A celestial woman dancer. Gandharvas and Apsaras could make themselves invisible and often frequented lakes, rivers and mountains.

p. 137 *Caurapancasika* — A poem by Bilhana, based on a legend that the poet had a clandestine love affair with the king's daughter and was condemned to death. The *Pancasika* comprises 50 verses, composed in captivity.

p. 140 The Great Dancer— Siva, Nataraja, who on the eve of destruction dances the terrific Tandava which initiates the great disintegration and the cosmic deluge.

pp. 146-148 — The experienced prostitue alludes derisively to various episodes in the Puranas. (*a*) After the churning of the ocean, Vishnu took the form of the enchantress Mohini to charm the Asuras into parting with the vessel of nectar. (*b*) Kunti, mother of the Pandavas, as a virgin had, out of curiosity, invoked the Sun god through a mantra and was seduced by him. (*c*) Rama was sent by Sita to hunt the golden deer, thus providing opportunity to Ravana to abduct her. (*d*) Yudhishthira's weakness for the dice lost him his kingdom and his family and ultimately led to the *Mahabharata* war. (*e*) Janamejaya, great-grandson of Yudhishthira, boasted of his virtues and landed himself in a series of troubles. He finally repented for his error. (*f*) Ganesa, the elephant-headed god, son of Siva, is the god of good luck; he removes all impediments.

p. 152 Vrndavana (Vrindavana) — The locale of the pranks of the cowherd god, Krishna. Literally, Vrindavana means a woodland where the *Vrinda* or sacred *Tulasi* plant grows.

p. 160 Godavari — An important river, originating near Pancavati and flowing east and south-east into the Bay of Bengal. Rama, with Sita and Lakshmana, spent two years at Pancavati ('grove of five banyan trees').

In Bhavabhuti's play, twelve years after his return to Ayodhya and his banishment of

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Sita, Rama goes again to the banks of the Godavari and recalls the days spent there with Sita during their exile.

p. 161 Tamasa — A tributary of the Ganga, which rises in the Vindhyas. In the *Ramayana* story, Tamasa was charged by Ganga to accompany Sita to Pancavati to see Rama while herself remaining invisible.

p. 163 Malati — In the story of Malati and Madhava, on which Bhavabhuti based his play, Malati is the daughter of a king's minister; Madhava a young student. The king wants Malati to marry his brother-in-law, Nandana, but is foiled by Kamandaki and finally the lovers are united.

p. 166 — The play *Venisamharam* is based on an episode in the *Mahabharata.* Draupadi, put as a stake and lost on the throw of the dice, loosened her hair and vowed that she would tie them together in a plait only after washing them with the blood of the Kauravas. This terrible vow was fulfilled after Bhima vanquished Duryodhana in a mortal duel.

p. 167 Angada — Son of Bali. When Bali was killed by Rama and succeeded by Sugriva, Angada joined Rama's army and was sent as a messenger to Ravana's court.

p. 169 *Cataka* (*Cuculus melanoleucus*) — A bird of the cuckoo family with a plaintive call. Poetic convention has it that the Cataka does not drink any water except the rain that falls during the constellation Svati.

p. 169 *Cakora* — A crested bird of the partridge family. According to poetic conceit, the bird is totally infatuated with the moon and can eat burning embers in its infatuated state.

p. 169 Govinda — An epithet of Krishna. Literally, Govinda means 'finder of cows'.

p. 174 *Tilaka* — An auspicious mark on the forehead (see note to page 91 on *Tika*)

p. 176 *Kimsuka* (*Butea frondosa*) — The Flame-of-the-Forest.

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p. 179	*Malati* (*Jessaminum grandiflorum*)	—	A creeper bearing a profusion of fragrant white flowers.
p. 179	Narmada	—	A river rising in the Vindhyas and flowing westwards through beautiful wild country. Literally, Narmada means 'one who gives pleasure'.
p. 179	Murala	—	A tributary of Godavari.
p. 180	Vijjika	—	The poetess Vijjika had a very dark complexion; the goddess of poetry, Sarasvati, is visualised as white.
p. 182	Ajakarani	—	A river in the central sub-Himalayan region.
p. 182	*Jamun* (*Ficus jambolana*)	—	Bears dark purple plum-like berries in the rainy season. It grows frequently on river banks.
p. 183	Mahi		A river referred to in Buddhist literature.
p. 192	*Sephali* (*Shephali*) (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*)	—	A fragrant yellow-white flower of the early autumn; the flowers bloom in the night and are shed in the early morning.
p. 196	Yadu	—	The ancestor of the Yadava clan, in which Krishna was born. The Yadavas organised themselves into a strong confederation, but later fought amongst and destroyed themselves.

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